Bulletin

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President's Address

When I took on the role of President in 2020, at the start of the pandemic, I could hardly have expected the dramatic changes that were to come for us all. Even now the effects of COVID-19 are very much with us. Pleasingly, our Society seems to be no less vigorous, and indeed we have seen an influx of new members.

One thing that we can be sure of is that at some point in this year we shall find out when the next general election will be. I wrote a year ago in this publication about why our Society, as a rule, does not participate in politics, local or national. This stimulated a number of conversations and correspondences, and I am grateful to those who were motivated enough to discuss this with me. I am also pleased that for the large part, this seems to be a stance which Society members appreciate and support. So, I would take this chance to amplify the second part of my argument, which is that although the Society does not generally profess political opinions, its members most certainly should, and do.

The coming election seems likely to be a rancorous and divisive one, so we can expect to hear some ridiculous and ignorant statements from people who should know better. In such times those who have knowledge and understanding should consider how best to spread these gifts wisely. In the fields of biodiversity, geology and archaeological heritage the members of the IWNHAS have much to offer. And it is not always true that to do so makes no difference. During my tenure as president issues have risen to national prominence showing how well-informed and reasonable debate can impact policy. Foremost amongst them is climate change, and whilst a great deal remains to be done, it is a credit to those who continue to adhere to rational argument that our leaders have moved so far from the crazy denialism of the past. Another issue with a more local flavour is water quality. This is very much a challenge that has been brought to the attention of politicians by local and fact-based debate. Again, there remains a lot to do, but this is now a topic that political parties seeking power nationally ignore at their peril.

So, when the electoral bandwagon rolls into town, I would urge you to consider the issues that are important to you, perhaps the issues that inspired you to join our Society. It's unlikely that we members of the Society will have the same views on many things, but I can be certain that we have in common broad knowledge, sound argument, and a fact-based approach to debate. These are things often sorely lacking in many aspects of an election campaign. We can help to rectify that. It is easy to imagine that politics is for other people, but when it comes to issues, such as the environment, that affect us all, it cannot be. Your opinions, and your views, can make an impact on the Isle of Wight in this coming year. Please don't keep them to yourself.

In closing, I must offer my grateful thanks to the many members of the Society who I have worked with over my four years in office. My (admittedly largely ceremonial) role has been made much easier by

the diligent and effective work of the many volunteers who keep our Society going; in particular the section leaders, and members of Council, whose ongoing commitment and enthusiasm cannot be faulted. I am delighted to be handing the Presidency over to the capable hands of Vivian Roberts, and I look forward to seeing what more the Society will achieve during her tenure.

Matthew Chatfield

IMPORTANT NOTICE

At our AGM in 2022 it was agreed to raise our annual subscription to £30 (single) and £35 (family). In 2023, not everyone had adjusted their subscription but we overlooked this, whilst sending out reminders. There are still around forty members who are still paying at the old rate. For those people, this will be the last postal distribution. Please check that you are paying the current rate.

Centenary Dinner

Talk about one of the longest Centenary Celebrations ever….

Back in November 2019, the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society began what was to be a year long celebration of special events to mark reaching our Centenary – 100 years of promoting the study and conservation of natural history, and archaeology, especially in relation to the Isle of Wight, and to promote, in every possible way, the conservation of the flora and fauna of the Isle of Wight, and the proper preservation of all objects of special archaeological and geological interest.

A special dinner was one of the many planned celebratory events that ended up being postponed due to the Pandemic. However, on November 13th (almost 4 years to the day of our Centenary Birthday), we were delighted to finally get together for our Centenary Dinner!

50 Members of the Society attended a wonderful evening at the Isle of Wight College restaurant where we enjoyed a delicious three course menu prepared and served by the Catering Students.

Our MC for the event was Matthew Chatfield – IWNHAS President. We also enjoyed three esteemed speakers and IWNHAS legends – former President – Richard Smout speaking about the beginnings of The Society, how it came to be and the early influencers.

Dr Colin Pope – also former President, and current Secretary followed with a heartfelt speech on what The Society means personally, sharing some of his early encounters with the Society as 12 year old boy and how this shaped his journey. Finally, Dr Roger Herbert propelled us into the future, painting a picture of how things might look for the Society and all the great things we might look forward to working on over the next 100 years.

We would like to thank all members and volunteers involved in making the evening such a great success. Thanks also to the staff and students at The IW College for hosting such a memorable evening. Here's to the next 100 years!

Tina Whitmore

St Olave and Gatcombe Revisited

1030. Here King Olaf was killed in Norway by his own people and was afterwards canonised (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle C, Swanton 1996, 157)

A contribution to the previous *Bulletin* drew attention to the church dedication of St Olave at Gatcombe. It provided some background to the cult of St Olaf and mentioned other dedications to Norway's patron saint in England. It concluded with 'What cannot yet be established is the mechanism by which a church dedication to a Norwegian king common in eleventh-century mercantile centres came to a relatively secluded location on the Isle of Wight' (Margham 2023, 3).

This present contribution does not provide a definitive answer to the question of why St Olave at Gatcombe, but goes some way towards an explanation through providing further background information. The two strands of evidence investigated here are the career of a mid-eleventh century bishop of Selsey and the religious outlook of primary landholders on the Island in the same century. In the light of these observations, inferences can be made about the possible date of origin of Gatcombe's church.

Before the foundation of Chichester Cathedral in 1075 the seat of the bishop of Sussex was at Selsey. Grimketel was bishop of Selsey from 1038 until his death in 1047. He had accompanied Olaf on his return from England to Norway in 1015 along with three other English clerics who were all consecrated as missionary bishops. Olaf became king of Norway in the following year following his victory in a sea battle at Nesjar. After this 'with the zeal of the newly converted, he set about eradicating the last remnants of paganism in his kingdom, often by force and violence', introducing the 'Christian Law' at a national assembly decreeing that the only legal religion in Norway was Christianity. Olaf reigned until 1029 when he fled to Russia when Cnut, king of England and Denmark, formed an alliance with Norwegian magnates in an attempt to take over Norway. Olaf returned in 1030 but was defeated and killed at the battle of Stiklestad on 29th July (Ekroll 2020, 245).

Following reports of healings associated with his body, Olaf's coffin was exhumed and reburied in Trondheim's then only church in the following summer. The coffin was opened by Grimketel on 3rd August in the presence of king Swein, other dignitaries and a large crowd. After unsuccessfully attempting to burn a piece of Olaf's hair, Grimketel declared Olaf as a saint, which was approved by Swein and the 'common people' (Ekroll 2020, 246). Grimketel thus played a prominent role on the development of St Olaf's cult. After his appointment as bishop of Selsey it is highly likely that he was instrumental in developing the cult of St Olaf in southern England, and that church dedications to him were facilitated through his aristocratic connections: 'The written sources indicate that Bishop Grimkell [Grimketel] of Sussex had close contact with several of the aristocrats who founded churches dedicated to St Olav' (Ekroll 2020, 250). The proximity of the Island to Selsey alone may explain a dedication to St Olave at Gatcombe. It is, however, inherently likely that Scandinavian landholders in England were particularly motivated in founding churches dedicated to a Norwegian king. Such possibilities will be examined for the Isle of Wight.

Scandinavian land-holders are documented by two Island place-names. Branstone was *Brandestone* in 1086, the first element of the name being Brandr, an Old Scandinavian personal name (Mills 1996, 33). In 982 this was *Heantune*, the 'high *tūn'* (Sawyer 1968, S842), so the place-name had changed subsequent to this date. Swainston, 'Sveinn's *tūn*', was not recorded until 1213 (Mills 1996, 100) but is almost certainly a pre-Conquest place-name. Such names would appear to have originated as a consequence of the coming of Cnut's 'new men' during his reign between 1016 and 1035, although 'it is clear that there was no replacement of native landowners by foreigners on a scale that followed 1066' (Lawson 1993, 173-4). A further Scandinavian personal name associated with the Island is Osgod. This is an anglicised version of Old Norse Ásgautr (Lewis 2016, 187). In 1043-1044 an exchange of lands was made between Bishop Ælfwine of Winchester and Osgod (Sawyer 1068, S1391). This document, coincidentally witnessed by Bishop Grimketel, states that the bishop let Osgod 'the estate at Adderbury [Oxfordshire] in return for the estate which he held at Wroxall' for his lifetime (Robertson 1956, 185). It may not be coincidence that Adderbury is only 5½ miles from Fritwell, where there is a church dedicated to St Olave which was in existence by 1103 (Margham 2022, 3). Osgod Clapa was exiled by Edward the Confessor in 1046 (Williams 2004). It would appear that it was this Osgod who had held Wroxall and then Adderbury as the latter had reverted to Winchester by 1066 and he no longer hold Wroxall at this date (Williams and Martin 1992, 425; below). It

must, however, be acknowledged that seven instances of Osgod and 39 of Osgot were recorded in later Anglo-Saxon documentary sources (PASE). It is not known who held Gatcombe prior to 1066.

Further instances of Scandinavian personal names can be found amongst the landholders on the Island in 1066. Lewis (2016, 176) has drawn attention to the reasons why individuals had Scandinavian names in Wessex at this time: the names of the sons of 'real Danes', Cnut's 'new men', who would have been landholders in 1066; families coming south from the long-settled Danelaw of eastern England; and English families who took on elements of Danish identity. The latter is illustrated by the names of Earl Godwine's sons (below), four of whom had Danish names and one an English name. The Domesday folios for the Isle of Wight include the following Scandinavian personal names recorded for 1066: Bondi and Harold at Knighton, Ketil at Appleford, Chale, Shide and Whitefield, and Tovi at Alverstone, Binstead and Preston (Williams and Erskine 1989, 39, 52-54). Overall, 17% of Hampshire landholdings, which included the Isle of Wight, were associated with individuals with Danish personal names (Lewis 2016, 178). This is a minimum percentage as there are many instances of unnamed landholders for 1066. For instance, Domesday Book records that '3 brothers held it [Gatcombe] in parage of King Edward' (Williams and Erskine 1989, 52v), so a landholder of Scandinavian descent or identity is a possibility here.

Although not of Scandinavian descent, Godwine was one of Cnut's 'new men'. He received an earldom by 1018 (Lawson 1993, 177). This was somewhere in greater Wessex, and by the end of Cnut's reign he held the earldom of Wessex, coming into possession of former royal demesne (Barlow 2002, 37). He was the most influential ealdorman in England during the reign of Edward the Confessor until his death in 1053. Somewhat anachronistically Domesday Book records Godwine as holding land at Wroxall in 1066, which plausibly came to him after Osgod's exile, also at Bonchurch and Woolverton in Bembridge. Some of Godwine's children had lands on the Island prior to 1066: Queen Edith at Wootton, Harold at Heasley and Kern, and Tostig at Compton, Freshwater, Nunwell and Thorley. These estates were probably inherited from their father, so this distribution of lands gives an impression of Godwine's former landholding on the Island. This and his wider political influence may be cited as a mechanism by which a dedication to St Olave became established at Gatcombe. Earl Godwine and his wife Gytha (a Danish name) were important patrons of St Olave's Exeter (Dickins 1937-45, 56). It has also been suggested that the Olave dedication at Poughill 'may have been influenced by the pre-Conquest possession of land in this area of north Cornwall by Gytha, the wife of Earl Godwine and mother to Tostig and Harold II' (Margham 2023, 3; Orme 2022, 112).

The career of Bishop Grimketel and the religious affiliations of landholders in southern England, particularly before the Conquest, thus provide a context for the establishment of a chapel, later a church, at Gatcombe dedicated to St Olave. Can these insights provide any indication of its date of origin? Frederick Hockey in his *Insula Vecta* (1982, 6) stated that Gatcombe was founded by the de Estur family, *i.e.* after the Norman Conquest, but does not provide a reference. This may be an assumption on his part, and if so, raises the possibility of an earlier origin. This foundation and the St Olave dedication can plausibly be assigned to any one of three chronological periods, two of which predate 1066.

The development of St Olaf's cult after his death in 1030 may suggest the origins of Gatcombe church later in Cnut's reign over England or during the reign of his son Harthacnut . Cnut died in 1035 to be succeeded by Harthacnut in Denmark and as king of England from 1040 to 1042. The rapid development of Olaf's cult in England has been advocated by Townend (2005, 267). An alternative view was advanced by Ekroll (2020, 251) arguing for its introduction during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066) demonstrating opposition to the Danish royal house with the restoration of the house of Wessex. As already mentioned, Hockey claimed a post-Conquest foundation for Gatcombe church. Despite the arguments advanced above this is plausible as the new Norman landholders were familiar with Olaf's cult. Olaf had been baptised in Normandy at Rouen in 1014 by Archbishop Robert, brother of Duke Richard II, who in turn was the grandfather of William the Conqueror (Ekroll 2020, 249). By 1086 William fitzStur, who was born in 1055 at Toravilla in Normandy (Geni), held Gatcombe, his descendents becoming known as de Estur, cited by Hockey.

As mentioned in the previous *Bulletin* (Margham 2023, 3) there is no direct evidence for the existence of a church or chapel at Gatcombe until the twelfth century. With the exception of the foundation of St Nicholas within Carisbrooke Castle between 1066 and 1086 the mother parish (*parochia*) centred on the minster at Carisbrooke apparently remained intact until the documented foundation of St Andrew's Chale in 1114. However, the process of fragmentation of an 'extensive estate' coterminous with

Carisbrooke's *parochia* was well-advanced by 1066, evidenced by the existence of manors independent of Bowcombe by this date (Margham forthcoming). A document of *c.*1000 states that a freeman had 'the outward and visible signs of thegnly rank' having acquired 'five hides of land of his own, a church and a kitchen, a bell-house and a fortress gate, a seat and special office in the king's hall' (Blair 2005, 371). The possession of a church was thus part of this aspiration to social advancement by the early eleventh century, thus supporting the possibility that Gatcombe church originated before the Conquest. However, all that can be said with reasonable certainty is that Gatcombe's dedication to St Olave indicates the foundation of a manorial chapel or church after 1038 and by the early twelfth century.

Acknowledgement
I am grateful to Øystein Ekroll, Trondheim cathedral archaeologist, for alerting me to the significance of Grimketel in developing the cult of St Olaf in England

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Dormice at Haseley

Anthony Robert's nature reserve at Haseley is a site with a large number of Dormice nest boxes. These are checked regularly by licenced volunteers under the guidance of the People's Trust for Endangered Species. Remarkably, autumn counts of Dormice in recent years have been incredibly high, indeed higher than any other monitored site under the National Dormice Monitoring Programme. September and October are the months when there are the most litters and numbers of Dormice are greatest. 98 Dormice were the highest number counted at Haseley. This November, when counts are generally lower as Dormice are going into hibernation, yielded a count of 63 Dormice. The photos above (left: Selena Bone; right: Chuck Ecclestone) were taken under licence.

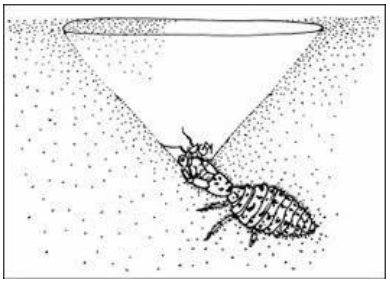
Antlions on the Isle of Wight

I was delighted to join a moth trapping event, held as part of the Eco Church programme, at St. Helen's Church on 4th September. It was a very successful evening with 470 moths of 75 species recorded, but the highlight for me was the appearance of an Antlion, *Euroleon nostras*. This was the second IW record of this species, following one taken at a moth trap in Bonchurch on 9th August 2020. A third specimen was found dead in a spider web at Ventnor Botanic Garden on 14th September.

Left: Antlion, Bonchurch August 2020; *Right: Antlion St Helen's church September 2023*

Antlions are related to lacewings, with which we are all familiar. The larvae are predators, but unlike lacewing larvae which actively hunt their prey, the larvae of antlions construct pitfall traps in sandy soil, creating an inverted cone by burrowing backwards. They bury themselves at the base of the pit with their jaws above the surface and lie in wait for their prey to blunder into the pit. As their prey passes the pit, the antlion will flick sand grains at them causing them to slip to the bottom of the pit where they are grabbed in

the antlion's jaws. Although ants are common prey items, they will take other invertebrates such as woodlice, millipedes, spiders and ground beetles. The prey is sucked dry then thrown out of the pit.



The larvae overwinter twice, forming a cocoon in the spring of their third year and emerging as an adult in July and August. Antlions larvae are efficient processors of their food and produce only liquid waste, a small faecal pellet being excreted shortly after emerging as an adult. The adults fly to the tops of pine trees where mating takes place. The females then fly to the ground and lay their eggs in the sand.

This species is widespread in continental Europe and in 1996, after a few earlier sightings, they were found to be breeding at Minsmere RSPB. Since then, they have been found along the coast from Great Yarmouth to Ipswich and a colony has become established at Holkham NNR in Norfolk. Occasional antlion records in southern counties, including these on the Island, are presumed to be of individuals carried from the continent by favourable wind conditions.

A second antlion species, the Black-headed Antlion, *Myrmeleon formicarius*, has also been recorded on the Island, taken at a moth trap at Freshwater in August 2013. Captured at a time of significant migrant moth activity it was considered to be an immigrant. It was new to Britain and remains the only record. Black-headed Antlion is locally distributed across Europe from Spain to southern Scandinavia.

Iain Outlaw

Grey seal interaction with a White-Tailed Eagle: spitting as a means of defence?

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Abstract

Grey Seals, *Halichoerus grypus*, are abundant, native pinnipeds to the waters of the Isle of Wight and Solent, UK reappearing after an absence of ~three decades. The White-tailed Eagle, *Haliaeetus albicilla*, became extinct on the south coast and the Isle of Wight around 1780, but were re-introduced in 2019. Presently, only a few eagle pairs have remained on the island, and none have yet bred. Nonetheless, the eagles are observed on a regular basis while fishing in the lagoons and inlets of the Island's north coast or when roosting in nearby trees. Grey seals are regularly seen in most of the islands' larger inlets on the north coast. Here we present for the first-time photographic evidence of an interaction between a Grey Seal and a Sea Eagle that suggests competition between these taxa is already a component of these animals' ecology. In one of our photographs an eagle flies over a Grey seal that at first reacts by barking. In a second photograph taken shortly after, the seal is seen spitting a jet of water at the eagle, a defensive behaviour that we believe has not previously been reported.

Introduction

By way of a chance encounter, one of us (CLJ), while birdwatching, was fortunate enough to observe and photograph one of the recently introduced White-Tailed Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) swoop towards the surface of the water of Newtown Harbour inlet of the Isle of Wight, England during a high tide on 3rd January 2022 (Fig. 1). At the time the eagle swooped toward the surface (Fig. 2A), an adult Grey seal emerged from below the water directly beneath the eagle, an interaction that fortunately was recorded on camera. On observing the digital images, it was clear that after first barking at the eagle, the seal ejected a stream of water directly at the eagle (Figs. 2B,3). We consider that this was a defensive action to drive the eagle away. As far as we can determine, no such event has previously been documented between these two top-level predators.

Location, time and recording equipment

The observation of the animal interaction reported here occurred during the morning of 3rd January 2022. The event was recorded on a Nikon DSLR camera with a Tamron 600 mm telephoto lens, on the waters of the Newtown tidal estuary of the Newtown River on a stretch of water called Clamerkin Brook, or Clamerkin Lake during high tide (Figs. 1, 2A). Approximate National Grid reference SZ 426915.

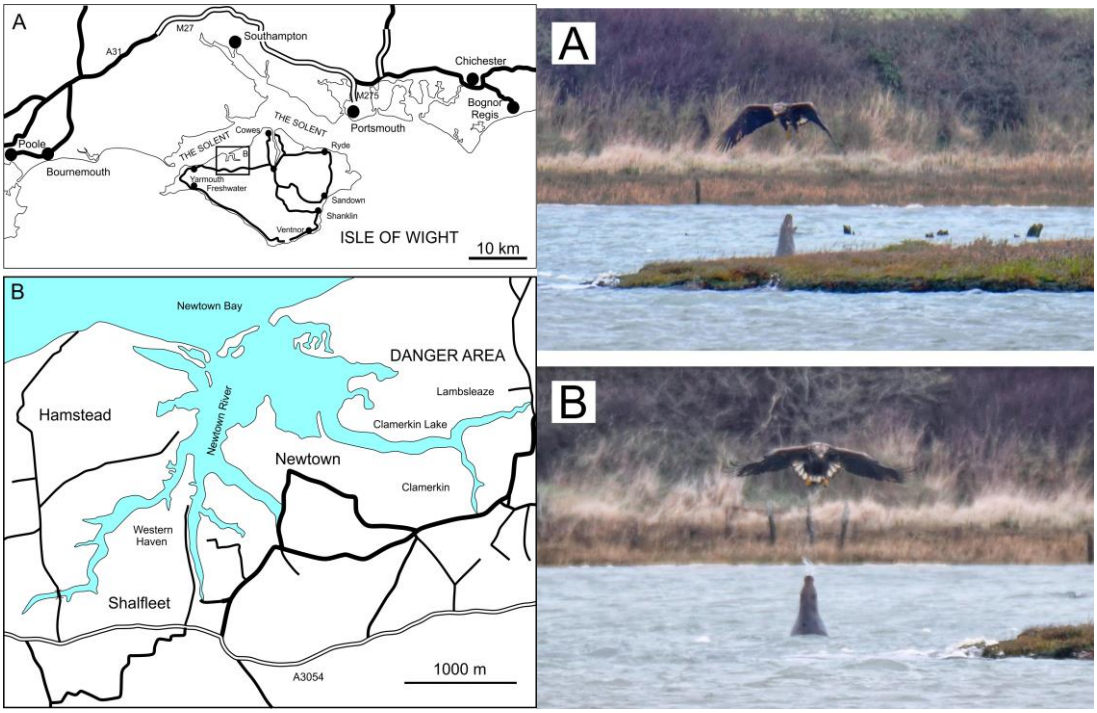

Fig. 1. *Location of Newtown Harbour, Clamerkin Brook/Lake and the site where the Grey Seal-Sea Eagle interaction took place.* ***Fig. 2.*** *Photograph showing a Sea Eagle swooping down towards the surface of Clamerking Lake at Newtown Harbour, Isle of Wight on 3rd of January, 2022.*

Observations

As noted above, one of us (CLJ) observed one of a pair of White-Tailed eagles that have settled in the region of Newtown Harbour since their reintroduction into the Isle of Wight beginning in 2019. This eagle pair is seen regularly as they frequently roost in a number of large (dead?) trees on the eastern flanks of the harbour. The land here is a military zone and receives very little disturbance, as there are no nearby public rights of way. The pair of eagles, known by the introduction team as *G274 and G324*, are seen regularly by local birdwatchers and have become something of an ornithological spectacular.

In the photograph it is clear that the Grey seal is disturbed by the arrival overhead of the Sea Eagle (Fig. 2). Closer inspection of the photograph reveals that the Grey Seal has spat a stream of water towards the White-Tailed Eagle as a response to its arrival (Fig. 3).

Discussion

White-Tailed Eagles became extinct on the Isle of Wight in 1780, when the last breeding pair nested on Culver Cliff on the eastern end of the Island, near Sandown. A bold reintroduction programme, a partnership between Forest England and the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation, began introducing young White-Tailed eagles taken from Scottish breeding pairs to the Isle of Wight in the summer (June to August) of 2019 (Mayhew et al., 2016; Diamond, 2019; Jagait, 2022). Initially 6 juveniles were introduced, but the introduction licence permits for up to sixty birds to be introduced over a five-year period. It

is assumed that not all birds will remain on the Isle of Wight but will relocate to suitable sites along the length and breadth of the English side of the English Channel, as pairs have already done at Arundel (Sussex) and Pool Harbour (Dorset) (WWT, 2022; Dennis, 2023).

White-tailed eagles, the largest of all European eagles, can achieve a maximum wingspan reaching of 2.6 metres, although it is usually smaller at around 2.26 m for males and 2.37 m for females (Brown and Amadon, 1968), and achieving a mass of between 4 to 6.9 kg for females, and between 3.1 to 5.4 kg for the somewhat smaller males (Ferguson-Lees and Christie, 2001). Scottish Sea Eagles manly feed on fish and waterfowl (Watson et al., 1992), all of which are abundant in Newton harbour, but reports of the Isle of Wight White-Tailed Eagles feeding habits are scarce. They are known to take Canada Geese, corvids and gulls, as well as carrion, marine and freshwater fishes (Valeri, 2016; Perry 2023).

Grey seals feed mainly on Sand Eels, Whiting, Cod, Herring and Salmon smolt (Simmons et al., 2021) and thus are in direct competition with introduced White-Tailed Eagles for fish resources.

Conclusions

Sightings of Grey seals and White-tailed eagles are frequent events now on the Isle of Wight, but interactions between these two species have so far not been reported. The account described here is the first record of an interaction between these two top predators, and the first report of Grey Seals using spitting as a means of defence or deterrence against an aerial foe. As piscivores, these animals may often be in competition for prey, and spitting by Grey Seals maybe a strategy for excluding White-Tailed Eagles from competing for prey. Spitting is an unusual behavioural activity among vertebrates, found in humans, camelids and some snakes where it is used for venom delivery. It can also be used for prey capture as in the Archer fish *Toxotes blythii*. We now add the Grey Seal to this list of spitting vertebrates.

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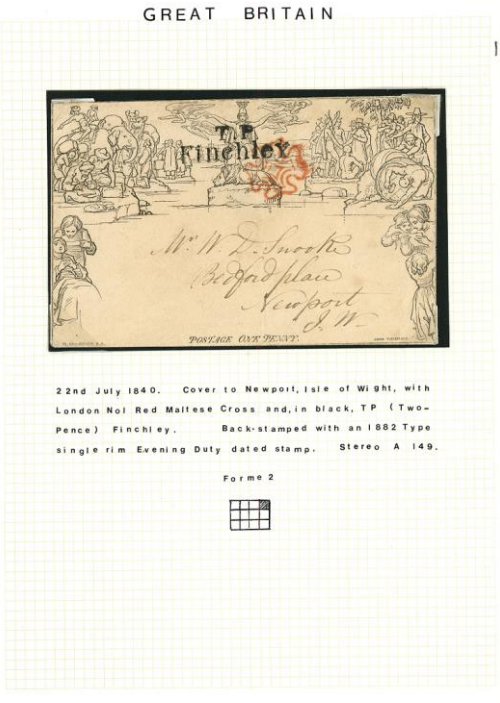
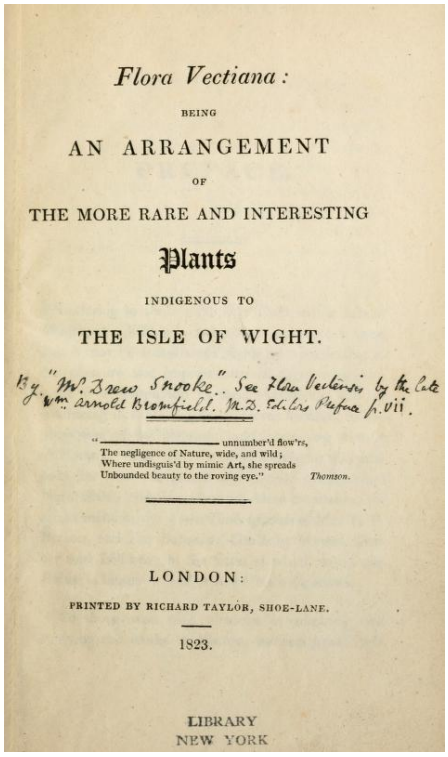
Early reference to the botanist, William Drew Snooke (1787-1857)

William Snooke was an Island schoolmaster, a teacher of mathematics, with an interest in botany and astronomy. He wrote the first ever list, or catalogue, of Island plants, published as *Flora Vectiana* in 1823. He lived in Godshill, although the greater part of his life was spent in Ryde. However, in 1840, he was living in Newport as discovered by Robin Attrill, who came across a 'Mulready' envelope recently sold as part of a lot at Stanley Gibbons. Mulready envelopes were sold were the first prepaid stationery, issued in 1840, parallel with the world's first stamp, the Penny Black. The envelope carried a depiction of Britannia distributing post to the continents of Asia and North America and families absorbed in their letters, drawn by William Mulready, a well-known artist at the time. Mulready letters and envelopes did not last for long. They were not well received by the public and they were soon withdrawn, to be replaced by postage stamps.




Flora Vectiana:

BEING

AN ARRANGEMENT

OF

THE MORE RARE AND INTERESTING

Plants

INDIGENOUS TO

THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

By "Mr. Drew Snooke." See Flora Vectiana, by the late Wm. Arnold Bromfield. M.D. Edin's Preface p. vii.

"_____ unnumber'd flow'rs,
The negligence of Nature, wide, and wild;
Where undisguis'd by mimic Art, she spreads
Unbounded beauty to the roving eye." *Thomson.*

LONDON:

PRINTED BY RICHARD TAYLOR, SHOE-LANE.

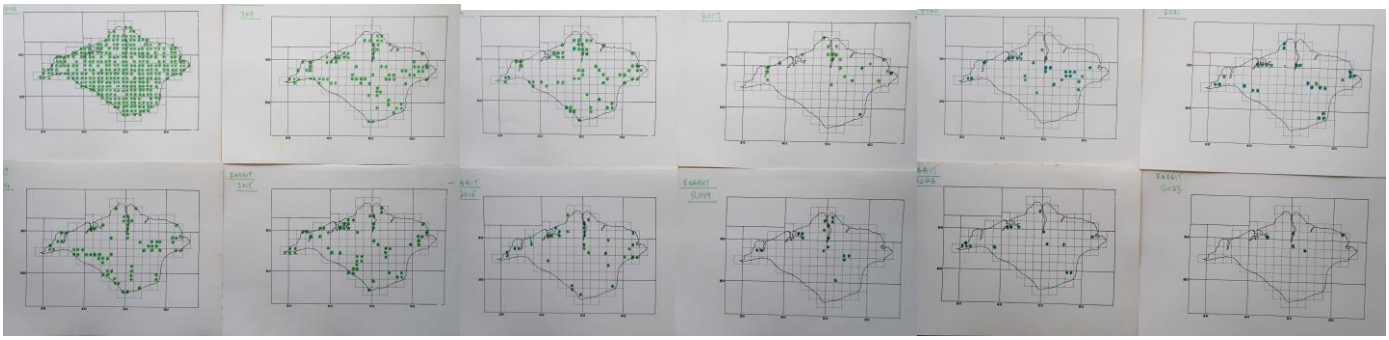
1823.

LIBRARY
NEW YORK

Where are all the rabbits gone?

The European Rabbit has been the commonest wild mammal we see in the countryside. However, 2019 survey results from the British Trust for Ornithology show that the population of wild Rabbits has declined by more than 60% between 1995 and 2022. The main cause is Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD) which has been around since the early 1990's. A new strain of the virus, VHD2, has proved to be particularly virulent. It will kill young Rabbits and can cause mortality as high as 99% within populations. However, its spread is patchy.

David Biggs has been recording and mapping Rabbits when he is out and about in the countryside. This is a highly subjective study however his results over the past thirteen years since 2010 reveal a pattern which many of us will have noticed. Rabbits can still be seen locally but they are far from being the ubiquitous wild animal they once were.



British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) News

Winter Gull Survey (WinGS)

The Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) is back! After two decades, the British Trust for Ornithology is organising WinGS for the winters of 2023/24 and 2024/25. The previous survey concluded that the UK and its near-shore coastal waters supported over 3.8 million wintering gulls at that time. We aim to collect updated information on the distribution of gulls in the UK by targeting key roosting sites and other sites to estimate populations of the six most abundant species in the UK: the Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull and Mediterranean Gull.

If you would like to take part but feel your gull identification skills could be improved, then we have courses in identifying the most common gull species you would encounter on a survey. Find out how to take part here.
https://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/training-courses

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

The BBS is the main scheme for monitoring the population changes of our breeding birds. Surveyors make two early morning spring visits to their 1-km squares, recording all birds seen and heard across two parallel transect routes. The Isle of Wight has its second consecutive year of record BBS coverage: early and late visit data from 24 of the 26 allocated squares and early visit data only from a further 2 squares so thanks to all the team!

A total of 86 species were recorded with the 10 most recorded species as follows:

Most widespread species for BBS

Isle of Wight in 2023

Species	Squares	Percentage of all squares surveyed	Individuals
Woodpigeon	26	100%	578
Blackbird	26	100%	284
Wren	26	100%	271
Carrion Crow	25	96%	180
Goldfinch	25	96%	137
Robin	24	92%	234
Blue Tit	24	92%	179
Jackdaw	23	88%	306
Great Tit	23	88%	121
Chiffchaff	23	88%	86

This is similar to the top tens of 2022 and 2021 – Dunnock just missing out this year. Greenfinch and Buzzard reported across more squares although total numbers remain similar to previous years. Swallow and Yellowhammer also reported more widely along with a slight increase in numbers which may reflect an additional downland square being covered this year. Swift reported only from 2 squares although total numbers remain similar to last year.

Many thanks to the BBS surveyors who took part in 2023: Jess Aldred, Jim Baldwin, Ian Boyd, Peter Burgess, Darren Davis, Dave Fairlamb, James Gloyn, Mark Larter, Patricia Lockwood, Kevin Lover, Sarah McWilliam, Tony Sztypuljak, Teresa Tearle, Andrew Twyman and Daphne Watson. Sadly, it looks like a few of our surveyors are stepping down so please contact me if you are interested in taking part in 2024. Training and support available if required.

Teresa Tearle (BBS Regional Organiser)

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

Sixteen sites received coverage for the July 2022 to June 2023 count year. Unfortunately, site access problems prevented counts at Sandown Meadows NR from January to June 2023 inclusive.

62 species of waterbird were recorded plus 4 Category E species (Escape & hybrids). The table below lists the top 10 sites which recorded the most waterbird species seen during the reporting year (excluding Escapes and hybrids).

Site	Site Status	Number of species
Newtown NNR	Very High Priority	47
Brading Harbour (Bembridge Hbr & Brading Marshes RSPB Reserve)	Very High Priority	46
Medina Estuary	Very High Priority	39
Western Yar	Very High Priority	37
Wootton Creek	Very High Priority	26
Foreland	Very High Priority	25
Thorness Bay	Very High Priority	25
Hersey NR	High Priority	21
Kings Quay	Medium High Priority	20
Ryde Pier to Puckpool Point	Very High Priority	19

For the first time since 2015/16, Newtown NNR recorded the most waterbird species in the reporting year for WeBS relegating Brading Harbour to second. However, it should be noted that no counts took place at Brading Harbour between April to June due to potential breeding bird disturbances.

The largest concentration of waterbirds recorded at a site during a day was 5,290 at Newtown NNR on 22nd January 2023 (there were 5,699 birds recorded, majority were gulls, during a gull roost count on 4th

October 2022). Three other sites recorded over 1,000 in a day; Western Yar (2,729 on 13th January 2023), Brading Harbour (2,691 on 26th November 2022) and River Medina (1,479 on 20th February 2023).

Counts were made along the Western Yar (Yar Estuary) (Kevin Lover), at Newtown NNR (John Willmott *et al)*, at Thorness Bay (Dave Hunnybun), along the River Medina (Medina Estuary) (Keith Marston), at Carisbrooke Pond (Richard Knight), at Towngate Pond (Jackie Hawkins), at King's Quay (George Rowing *et al*), at Wootton Creek (Derek Hale), at Bathingbourne Reservoir (Jon Sparshott), at Ryde Canoe Lake (Charlotte Goswell), at Ryde East Sands (Charlotte Goswell), at Hersey NR (Jackie Hart), at Sandown Meadows NR (Patricia Lockwood), at Sandown Canoe Lake (Tracy Dove), at Brading Harbour (Brading Marsh and Bembridge Harbour) (James Gloyn *et al*) and at Foreland (Mark Buckley). Many thanks to all of the above counters and their respective teams for the excellent coverage throughout the reporting period.

BirdTrack

Just a reminder that the BirdTrack migration blog brings you the national birding highlights from the previous week as well as looking ahead. Winter can provide some fantastic birding opportunities and the blog predicts what species are likely to turn up: https://www.bto.org/community/blog/birdtrack-migration

Rare Breeding Bird Panel Report 2021

Every year the Rare Breeding Birds Panel releases its findings, reporting on the status of 111 bird species with a rare or scarce status. The panel's work is vital for understanding what is happening to many of our most imperiled bird species. In the last 50 years we have seen a number of species leave the list, as well as a number join it and some disappear from our shores entirely. Along with other organisations, the BTO is represented on this panel. Dawn Balmer, head of Surveys, is the panel's chair.

The summary of the 2021 report can be viewed using the link below (existing British Birds magazine subscribers can view the full report in the November 2023 issue):
https://rbbp.org.uk/2021-report-overview

Jim Baldwin (BTO Regional Representative)
Tel. 07528 586683, email: wightbto@hotmail.com

Riverfly recording on the Isle of Wight

Globally, freshwater wetlands are under multiple threats from pollution, drainage, drought and invasive species. One group of insects that have proven to be particularly vulnerable to poor water quality and degraded habitat are the Riverflies. These include the Stoneflies (Plecoptera), Mayflies (Ephemeroptera) and Caddisflies (Trichoptera). All are very familiar to fly-fishermen who take seriously the design and construction of elaborate tied-flies that mimic the shape, colour and behaviour of live insects, hoping to lure unsuspecting Salmon and Trout. Yet we don't have suitable rivers for fly fishing on the Island and have not had a systematic survey of Riverflies, so we have little local knowledge. Compared to dragonflies and damselflies these groups are relatively small and inconspicuous and a low recording effort could be the major reason why they have been poorly represented in our local lists. Yet it is possible that our poor river water quality, canalisation, and habitat degradation, have caused species demise. However, there could be other factors too. Compared to many regions, the Isle of Wight has short, narrow, slow flowing rivers and a relatively small area of freshwater habitats such as ponds and marshes. Populations trying to establish could struggle to find enough patches to colonise and grow to a viable number. Areas of small habitat can also be homogenous and unsuitable for specialist species. Importantly, our disconnection with the mainland may also limit the number of individuals of a species that arrive here in sufficient numbers to establish. A low dispersal capability, in each of these groups, has been given as another reason for poor representation.

So where are we in terms of Riverfly recording? Table 1 shows that at the turn of the last century there were very few known Riverflies. Morey (1909) remarked that others '*awaited an Isle of Wight historian*'. In 1943, we were fortunate in having the distinguished entomologist Dr. Kenneth G. Blair retire

from the British Museum (Natural History) to Freshwater Bay on the Isle of Wight, where he continued to 'work' and find three species of moth new Britain, in addition to contributing many records for the Island. He updated the list of 'Neuroptera' in our *Proceedings* for 1950, including several new species of Riverfly, some of which he found himself, though was reliant on his friend H.G. Jeffries, a mainland entomologist, for many of the Caddisflies.

Table 1. Number of Riverfly species recorded on the Isle of Wight. Total number in Britain and Ireland shown in right column, with % so far recorded on the Island.

Group	**Morey (1909)**	**Blair (1950)**	**2023**	**Britain & Ireland (% IOW)**
Stoneflies	0	3	10	35 (29%)
Mayflies	1	2	14	51 (27%)
Caddisflies	4	28	91	202 (45%)

Although we have not had a serious survey of Riverflies on the Island, all families are useful indicators of water quality, and records of larvae and nymphs are included within statutory river surveillance programmes across the UK. In the 1980s, I received records from biologists employed by Southern Water Authority, however their responsibilities were taken over first by the National Rivers Authority and subsequently the Environment Agency. The number of sites monitored has reduced over the years, and recent published macroinvertebrate data available from *Biosys* on the Environment Agency website is only available for the Medina, Eastern Yar and Brighstone stream. Occasionally other rivers are sampled, including the Lukely Brook and River Caul Bourne. Between the 1980s and mid 2000s myself, colleagues and students at the Medina Valley Centre sampled these rivers and the Rodge Brook at Porchfield quite regularly and added more species to the list, particularly stoneflies and mayflies. More recently, we have been revisiting the Medina where in the 1990s surveys were undertaken from its source to the tidal limit at Coppins Bridge and we will be communicating these results in due course. Thanks particularly to Stephen Plumber and Iain Outlaw, there has also been an increase in the number of records of adult Caddisflies submitted to national recording schemes from light traps. So altogether to date we have about 40% of the known British species of Riverfly.

We will never know how many species we had in former years. Some may have been lost due to habitat degradation, such as the nationally uncommon stonefly *Nemoura dubitans* that Blair discovered on Freshwater marsh in the 1940s, which has since been largely drained. Yet we do know so much more now thanks to a higher level of recording effort, and the environment is changing. For example, nymphs of the large Mayfly *Ephemera danica* are present in more of the Island's streams including the Lukely Brook in Newport, where it was absent in the 1980 and 1990s.

However, I don't believe we have hit a ceiling yet, and I am sure there are other species waiting to be found and recorded. For example, there could be specialist species within the small streams and seeps along the Undercliff which have been overlooked. So, I repeat the plea of K.G Blair in 1950:
'If only members of this Society would take the trouble to collect even a few specimens of these groups and send them to me I shall be most pleased to give any assistance I can with regard to name or advice'.

If you have Caddisflies in your moth traps, I am happy to have look at them (or pass them on to others), or send them to national recorders at Buglife – see link below. The aquatic larvae and nymphs are more challenging to collect as you will require a net and some wellies! Observations of Mayfly emergence or the distinctive rise and fall of dancing swarms are also of interest. Please communicate any records me or the Society office, and we will pass these to our Local Biological Records Centre. This way we can monitor our local list more effectively – and our local wetlands.



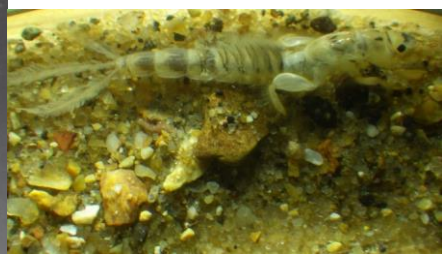


Fig. 1 (left) *Larva of the caddisfly Halesus radiatus. River Medina.10th March 2023. Length head to end of case 32mm.* ***Fig. 2 (middle)*** *Nymph of stonefly Nemoura avicularis, River Medina. 11th March 2023. Length 9mm. March 2023.* ***Fig. 3 (right)*** *Nymph of mayfly Ephemera danica. Lukely Brook, 12th March 2023. Length 10mm. Photos Roger Herbert.*


Fig 4. *Emergence (left) and adult (imago) of mayfly Ephemera danica. Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland 12th May 2022. Photos Keith Marston.*

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Roger Herbert

More ramblings of Andy, an old fossil.

Well, firstly I have to apologise for the mix up of the cicada picture in February's Bulletin. This is the picture that should have been shown:

The Bird Skull Yarn

OK, this article was supposed to be about this year's finds. but this first one has only come together this year (sort of). Back in **27 June 2016,** I was on the shore about 500 yards west of Burnt Wood. I saw a likely looking lump of insect stone, picked it up and gave it a tap with a hammer. I had split an inch or so off the top and found myself looking at the top of a bird's skull, could it be? That's what it looked like to me. I double wrap it in kitchen roll, bag it and carry it home.

First chance I get, I take it over to Dinosaur Isle where I get a fair bit of, "well, yes it looks like that but …". Anyway a few weeks later I hear that Andy Ross is going to be at the Natural History Museum. Dr Ross led the study of the insect beds back in 2005. He's now based in Edinburgh at the Museum of Scotland. So, I arrange to visit London in **September 2016**. He has already ID several finds of mine: a caddis fly, a wasp and the wing of a mole cricket, and then I say what about this? He takes a look – "bird skull, nice find". Jerry Hooker comes in and looks. "mm, a bird skull". Then, Lorna Steel and Angela Milner came in to see it. They ask if they can keep it to scan it to see if there is any more bone in the rock. "Well, of course" I say,"but I think we would like it back on the Island at our museum", and I signed the papers saying that.

25 September 2017. Doorbell rings – postman with a package for me. The skull had been returned un-scanned! Machine fully booked for the foreseeable future and Lorna Steel is moving on. The fossil had sat on her desk all that time, and she had sent it back.

November 2017. '**Blast from the Past' at Dinosaur Isle** – I had been there all day and stayed for the talks in the evening. Dr Gostling from Southampton University gave a talk on dinosaurs. I was only half listening and I hear him say, we scan the rocks now. I think wait what - scan? On Sunday I went and had a word with Dr Gostling. "You have a scanner?" I tell him I have found, what may be a bird skull. "Bird skull"? he said. He visited my house in **20 December 2017**, has a look and says yes, he will scan and write it up, and he takes it to Southampton.

November 2018 – **Another Blast from the Past.** Dr Gostling was there. "ah" I say, "any news of the skull". He says "No, it's not been scanned yet, but it will be done". Patience is a virtue.

August 2021- I rang Dr Gostling "any news on the bird skull, only time marches on and I would like to know what it is before I fall off my perch". "No news I'm afraid, we haven't been able to scan it, due to Covid". Well, I'm not overjoyed but he said "I'll get it back to you".

February 2022. I was out at Dinosaur Isle to check a few things under an electron microscope. Martin Munt says "I've got a parcel for you" and he hands me the box. "Ah" I say, "Bird's head revisited".

1 March 2022. I had taken a few items for Alec Peaker to get some pictures: a spider, a few insects and the skull. Simon Penn was there, he looks at the skull and tells me he knows a guy who is working on fossil birds and he will text a picture to him and ask if he is interested.

June 2022 Simon tells me Dr Daniel Field will check it out and scan it. So, **13th June 2022** I send it to Cambridge.

6 December 2022, Dr Field has been in touch. It is definitely a bird skull. It has been scanned and there may be more in the rock. However, the rock which is a bit too dense to scan will need to be trimmed so they can re-scan it. He would have been in touch sooner, but ironically had been away on "field" work.

December 2023, Bird skull still in Cambridge. I think it might have been some sort of migratory bird, because since I found it, it has spent 1 year in London, 5 years in Southampton and 1 year in Cambridge, or perhaps a jail bird…….

Edwin Smith (also known as Edwin A'Court Smith)

May 2021 - Local council elections. I went across to vote, and when I came out, two hopeful candidates were waiting outside. I recognised one as a member of Gurnard Council. "Got a minute" I say, "yes, yes" and off I go. I tell him I would like his help to get a blue plaque on the house of Edwin Smith. I tell him he discovered and excavated a Roman villa in Gurnard and was famous across the globe for

discovering the fossil insect beds and he lived in Gurnard 1860 to 1900. "Ok, if you write all that down, and send it to me, I will see what I can do". "Thanks very much" I say. I go home and write it all down, we copy a picture of Smith and his family and I also sent some pictures of fossil insects I had found and send them to the Councillor. I wait a week, or two, or three and never heard anymore! After a month or so I thought I would try something else. I knew Edwin was buried in Northwood Cemetery, so wandered about at the Cemetery – it was a "dead" end. I spoke to a couple of workmen and they suggested I speak to Barry Sowerby, who I happened to know. I rang him and told him what I was after.

November 2021 He came round with a plan of the Cemetery showing where Edwin was buried with his wife Ellen beside him in an unmarked grave. Barry tells me I would need permission from the Council and any living relative, if I wanted to arrange for a headstone. This was all getting a bit complicated and would have just given up, but my sister came to my rescue. We contacted relatives and got their permission, filled in all the forms as required and got the go ahead. I decided to go for a headstone. I spoke to Geoff Banks, a local builder who does a lot of "church jobs" He suggested I contact Wight Stonemasonry, a Mr Hailstone! I spoke to David Hailstone, and he sent various brochures. I chose a bit of Portland Stone and decide to put Edwin's name, his wife's name and the dates and asked if he could put a dragonfly on it. David Hailstone said yes he could do that. There is a book about IW Geology written by Mark Norman, with a Longfellow quote about footsteps in the sands of time that I thought would be fitting for Edwin. Mr Hailstone drew a picture of what it would look like and my sister sent a copy to his living relative together with Edwin's life story as published the IWNHAS Proceedings Vol.10 1990 by Mr David L Motkin. I got a message back saying he liked it – so I go for it!

3.30 pm 28 November 2022, I received a phone call from Mr Hailstone, he tells me the headstone was finished and had been put in place. I walk down and take a look. A bit small, but it looks good – as you can see.

This episode is 2023, a vintage year for me.

Now, my problem is, in my mind's eye I am 36 and I can traipse from Cowes to Thorness, collect a bag full of rocks and then walk home again, but when I try it, I realise that I'm 76 and I have to sit down every 10 mins for a rest! For the last few months I have been leaving home before 06.00 am, I take sack trucks shovel, bags and a sort of large plastic tub that I bungee to the trucks. This day, the tide is out at 07.30 am, so I'm up and about at 4.45 am, cup of tea and some porridge and I get my gear from the shed. I set off from home 5.45 am, fairly quiet at this time of the day for traffic. I walk to Four Cross, down Pallance to Hillis Farmhouse, up the lane to Sticeletts Farm, down the lane to Whippance Farm, then down to the shore. I gather several large chunks of the insect stone, 5 or 6 inches deep. I get seven chunks in the tub and start back, dragging the sack trucks back the way I came. Midway along Sticeletts Farm lane there is a wooden bench in memory Mr & Mrs Bradley, I sit there and have a rest, and eat a couple of sections of nectarine. Then I go on to Hillis and have another sit down before tackling Pallance Road, I sit down again at Four Cross. It's been a bit of a struggle. On I go, arriving home at 10.00 am – done in. I lay the rocks in the sun to dry for a few days. This isn't new, George Colenutt used to collect from the insect beds. Whenever he found an outcrop of the stone that was up to a foot think, he would collect it all in a wheelbarrow. Now he was a solicitor so he'd have had a car, but can you imagine wheeling one of those 1930's wheelbarrows along Thorness beach? Horrendous great wooden things they were with an iron wheel. At least my sack trucks had pneumatic tyres!

24th July, I split one of the smaller pieces and found whatever this is. It looks a bit like a flower – it could be a winged seed with 5 lobes. (5 lobes and a couple of fishes – I could do the catering!)

18 – 19 November 2023 at Blast from the Past at Dinosaur Isle. Another nice find, which I think is a perfect beetle that had been buried in silt 36 million years or so ago. I caught the rock just in the right spot and it had split open to reveal both upper and lower side of the beetle. At this year's event, I put this delightful fossil under a microscope that projects the image onto a screen. I spend all day telling everyone that stopped to look at it, that this is like Ringo Starr, a very old beetle, until an entomologist stopped by to look at the beautiful preservation and he tells me I'm wrong about Ringo, it's not a beetle it's a weevil. Still nice though!


Andy Yule

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iWatch Wildlife

iWatch Wildlife is the Isle of Wight's species recording project hosted by the IWNHAS.
Now in its 8th year, iWatch Wildlife continues to promote, encourage and support wildlife recording both within The Society and the wider community. It also facilitates our natural history engagement and outreach.

Events

We had a busy summer in terms of events, kicking off the season in May with the 'Be More Green Festival' - a free family nature / sustainability event which took place at Moorgreen Road Reservoir, Cowes. Our activities and engagement were themed around Swifts, Hedgehogs and Stag Beetles - all local, key species in Cowes. We also did a spot of recording and clocked-up 97 species which will help support aspirations of managing the site for people and nature by the local community.

In June, we supported a mini-bioblitz event at St. Helen's Churchyard as part of the 'Churches Count on Nature' campaign. It was a glorious summer's day and the churchyard, which is managed sensitively for wildlife was buzzing with life - our final species tally was 141.

A follow-up evening session was held in September to record nocturnal species. 74 moth species were observed along with Pipistrelle bats plus Glow Worms – a species for which the churchyard has been a stronghold. These along with other taxa recorded on the night took the grand total to 229.

Our final public event of the season was the Wolverton Manor Garden Fair in September – the biggest and busiest yet by all accounts. We were based in the Conservation Tent and all aspects of the IWNHAS were successfully showcased by both the iWatch Wildlife and Archaeology Teams. Our theme this year was

Garden Wildlife Ponds beautifully illustrated with an aquarium with live specimens. We also ran a dragonfly craft activity and exhibited Natural History specimens via our pop-up portable museum.

Swifts
Thanks to funding from IW National Landscapes (formerly IW AONB) we are pleased to be able to continue the co-ordination of the IW Swift Box Scheme in partnership with Hampshire Swifts. If you would like to help our local swifts, then please do register your interest in nest box installation with us on iwswifts@gmail.com. At the time of printing, a box costs £40.00 with anticipated installation in April 2024 (subject to property suitability).

Species of the Month / Year
On the species recording front during 2023 we continued with our regular 'Species of the Month' campaign featuring the following: Frogs / Toads & Spawn, Hare, Adder, Hedgehogs, Stag Beetle, Screaming Swifts, Garden Tiger Moth, Barn Owl, Curlew, Wax Caps and Mistletoe. We are currently programming for 2024. Alongside this we ran 'Species of the Year' with Kingfishers being highlighted throughout 2023 – current records stand at **13** – look out for a feature in the IWNHAS column of the Isle of Wight County Press in February.

Hedgehogs
We have continued collecting Hedgehog records from social media and at events throughout the year with **19** live and **2** dead hogs being recorded to date – fewer than 2022. We have also incorporated data from IW Hedgehog Rescue into the IWNHAS database. Our data up to the end 2023 will be shared with the national survey 'The Big Hedgehog Map' (PTES) contributing to the national picture.

Stag Beetles
Another flagship species for us is the magnificent Stag Beetle. Records were down this year as with many insects generally with just **10** observations logged from Yarmouth, Cowes, East Cowes and Ryde. However, because of our species distribution knowledge, we have been able to request that a decaying oak street tree earmarked for removal at one of the known sites, be partially retained as standing deadwood habitat for this species.

Huge thanks to everybody that has taken time to record, help and support others and share their observations, knowledge and experience during 2023. Thank you to our brilliant volunteers without whom the project would not be possible – we look forward to another year of wildlife recording with you!

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.

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

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National Trust Species Recovery Project – Getting involved in surveys.

This year brings a new opportunity to get involved in surveying and monitoring of some of the UKs most threatened species present on National Trust land on the Island and contribute to their future conservation. Data collected will help us gain a clearer understanding of the species status, their habitat requirements and threats to their populations,
The species that we will be focussing on are:

Vascular plants:	Early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
	Oxtongue broomrape (*Orobanche picridis*)
	Yarrow broomrape (*Phelipanche purpurea*) Photo overleaf @ Jess Aldred
Lepidoptera:	Glanville fritillary (*Melitaea cinxia*)
	Dew footman moth - (*Setina irrorella*)
Hymenoptera:	Potter flower bee - (*Anthophora retusa*)

Cliff furrow bee - (*Lasioglossum angusticeps*)

The species selected are on Natural England's Species Recovery list and chosen on the basis that the National Trust has 20%+ of the UK population on their properties and are therefore in a good position to aid their recovery. For some of the species, such as Dew Footman and the bees, we do not have enough data from which to assess current populations, so we will be undertaking surveys within suitable habitat on our sites across the Island. Other species such as Glanville Fritillary and Early Gentian, though threatened nationally are doing well or have significant populations on the Island, so we will be looking at where we can help existing populations expand, to give them greater resilience as the climate and land use changes.

We are looking for volunteers to join us in surveying for these species. We are planning to start regular training and recording days across the Island in March, starting with surveying Glanville fritillary larval webs, and will be undertaking targeted surveys for some species throughout the year.

If you would like to get involved and volunteer for the National Trust on this project, then please contact Dee, our Senior Volunteering and community officer at denise.makin@nationaltrust.org.uk or for further information contact me at paul.davies@nationaltrust.co.uk or by phone 07816 604911.

The project on the Island is part of the National Trust's White Cliffs and Wight Downs Species Recovery Project, focussing on threatened species across the chalk downland and coastal sites around Dover and the Isle of Wight.

Paul Davies, Project Ecologist, Isle of Wight
White Cliffs and Wight Downs Species Recovery Project

Andy's Nature Notes, July to December 2023

July

4th. A Ringlet butterfly and the large hoverfly, *Volucella zonaria* in the garden. A capsized trimaran lost in the Round the Island race on the 1st July drifted past my house this morning. Geoff Blake managed to salvage it and towed it into Ventnor Haven.

5th. The two Ronnies (seals) close in off Wheeler's Bay. A Humming-bird Hawkmoth [HBHM] along the revetment.

6th. 2 HBHM in the garden. A Lesser Black-backed Gull on the boathouse roof in the last stages of immature plumage.

7th. Walked along the path at the bottom of Bonchurch Down. 5 Dark Green Fritillaries, c.150 Marbled Whites, one Small Copper and 2 pristine Painted Lady. In the afternoon went over to Alverstone with Pete Campbell and saw 25 Banded Demoiselle, one Broad-bodied Chaser [BBC], 3 Comma, one White Admiral. A HBHM in the garden back home.

8th. 2 Bottle-nosed Dolphins heading east off home. 2 Mediterranean Gulls in the bay. In the afternoon went to Brading with Pete for a reported Roller. Saw it okay in the rain but it was a long way away nevertheless good views with Pete's telescope. Home by 21.00.

9th. Back to Brading for the Roller. Once again good telescope views but too far away for decent photos.

11th. 2 Holly Blues and a Comma in the garden.

15th. 11 Common Scoter, one Whimbrel, 4 Auk sp and a few Gannets all heading west off home in a south-westerly gale. Later Pete and I went to Brading for an Alpine Swift. Good views but very difficult to photograph due to the gale force winds.

16th. 2 Comma, 3 Ringlet, 5 Red Admiral,2 Holly Blue, 6 Gatekeeper, one Peacock, 6 Large White, 3 Meadow Brown, 2 Small White and one HBHM all in the garden.

17th. A female Blackcap in the garden.
18th. Pete and I went over to Porchfield and had a look along the edge of Lock's Copse. One Clouded Yellow, 40 fresh Peacock,6 Silver-washed Fritillaries, one Brimstone, c. 100 Gatekeeper, 6 Red Admiral, 3 Comma, one White Admiral, c.30 Marbled White and one Ruddy Darter dragonfly. Moved on to Newtown and saw one Common Sandpiper and 12 Little Egrets. A Clouded Yellow seen by Dave Nordell along the Wheelers Bay revetment. A Jersey Tiger moth in my garden.
19th. A Wall Brown butterfly and a male Emperor Dragonfly in the garden.
20th. 30 Common Blue,6 Red Admiral 2 Painted Lady and a Wall along the revetment. C. 50 Swifts over home, a Razorbill and Ron (seal) in the Bay.
21st. 5 Painted Lady and a HBHM along the revetment. *Nomada fucata* bee in the garden. Gannets diving for fish (probably Mackerel) off home in the evening.
25th. Managed to get down Whale Chine with my son David and get along to the Keeled Skimmer site just to the east of the Chine, we were last there in 2021. We saw only 5 Keeled Skimmers (4m, 1 f) but it was quite windy. Also c.12 *Cylindera germanica* tiger beetles.
26th. Ron close in off the Bay. A Migrant Hawker and a HBHM in the garden.
28th. A Bloxworth Snout moth indoors at home. An aberrant Meadow Brown in the garden, its upper wings mostly a creamy white colour.
29th. One or 2 Jersey Tiger moths in the garden most days as well as 2 or 3 Holly Blues.
31st A Fulmar Petrel and 3 Gannets off the Bay.

Left: *Alpine Swift;* ***Middle:*** *Cliff Tiger Beetle, Cylindera germanica;* ***Right:*** *Keeled Skimmer*

August

1st. 3 HBHM along the revetment. Common Sandpiper in the Bay.
2nd. A male Black Redstart in the garden this am. Also a Cory's Shearwater, one Arctic Skua, c.50 Gannets, 5 Kittiwakes and 2 Whimbrels off home in a SW. gale.
5th. Another Cory's Shearwater off home seen briefly.
6th. 44 Common Blues, one Chalkhill Blue, 2 Brown Argus and an Emperor Dragonfly all along the revetment.
7th. A Banded Damselfly and a 2nd generation Dingy Skipper along the revetment plus 3 Glanville Fritillary summer webs.
10th. 33 Jersey Tiger moths in and around the moth trap this morning. A bat, probably a Serotine, flying round Wheelers Bay car park at 16.00.
11th. Went to Bembridge with Pete. There were 9 Cattle Egrets, 3 Great Egrets and a Grey Heron all in a tree by St. Helen's Sluice and 2 White-tailed Eagles in a tree further up the river. Another Bloxworth Snout in my house.
15th. Walked along the bottom of Bonchurch Down late morning. 66 Adonis Blue (mostly male), the best for some years, 240 Chalkhill Blues, 4 Wall Brown,20 Common Blue and 8 Brown Argus. 3 Wheatears on the rocks in the Bay.
16th. A Clouded Yellow along the revetment.
17th. A Bloxworth Snout in the garden.
19th. 4 Holly Blues in the garden.

20th. 28 Portland Ribbon Wave moths in the trap this am, the most I've ever caught at one time.
25th. Newtown with Pete. 2 Eagles and an Osprey in the estuary.
28th. c.30 Gannets diving for fish about 3-4 miles out. Probably Mackerel.
29th. c. 250 Balearic Shearwaters, c.100 Gannets, 5 Auk sp. All heading east. A Willow Warbler in the garden.
30th. A Migrant Hawker in the garden.

September

1st. A Heron fishing in Bonchurch Pond by the 'No Fishing' sign!
2nd. 3-4 Holly Blues most days in the garden.
3rd. c.2000 Swallows going east past the front of my house between 07.30 and 11.30. 2 Clouded Yellows along the revetment.
4th. 3 HBHM and a Clouded yellow along the revetment.
5th. 4 HBHM along the revetment.
6th. A Convolvulus Hawkmoth in the trap this am. Pete and I went up to Stenbury Down this morning and logged 8 Common Redstarts, 11 Wheatears, 4 Whitethroats, one Lesser Whitethroat, one Yellow Wagtail, 2 Stonechats, 4 Spotted Flycatchers, one male Sparrow Hawk, 12 Willow Warblers, one Tree Pipit, 40 Swallows and one Long-tailed Tit.
8th. Had a Common Sexton Beetle in the trap this am. First one I've seen.
10th. 3 HBHM, a Painted Lady,5 Red Admiral, 2 Peacock and 8 Large White along the revetment.
11th. 94 Box-tree Moths in the trap. A Blue-finned Tuna seen off Ventnor Haven jumping clear of the water by a reliable witness.
15th. Atherfield with Pete. 2 Red-veined Darters, 4 Migrant Hawkers, 2 Black-tailed Skimmers, 3 Wall Brown and a Common Sandpiper.
16th. 20 Peacock butterflies along the revetment. A male Blackcap in the garden.
20th. Yet another Bloxworth Snout, this time on the back door.
21st. Clouded Yellow in the garden plus a Southern Hawker dragonfly.
24th. A Sooty Shearwater flying west at 12.40 off Wheelers Bay in the strong westerly wind.
25th. A Clouded Yellow, 10 Peacock, 2 Painted Lady and 6 Large White along the revetment.
28th. A decomposing seal in the sea off home.
30th A Common Buzzard hunting low-down along the cliffs to the east of home.


Left: *Lesser Whitethroat;* ***Middle:*** *Convolvulus Hawk Moth;* ***Right:*** *Buzzard*

October

3rd. A pair of Ravens on the cliff back of the revetment
6th. A Western-conifer Seed Bug on the kitchen window.
8th. A Clouded Yellow, 2 HBHM and a Common Darter along the revetment. C.200 Ivy Bees in and around the lawn at home.
9th. 2 Chiffchaffs in the garden.
10th. The first Stonechat (a female) of the autumn along the revetment.

13th. Yarmouth Causeway with Pete. 52 Med Gulls, 15 Teal, 40 Coots, 34 Mute Swans, 4 Redshank, 6 Black-tailed Godwits and c.100 Black-headed Gulls.
14th. A late Common Whitethroat along the revetment plus one Clouded Yellow, one HBHM, one Painted Lady etc.
16th. A really miserable day! Cold east wind to gale force.
17th A Kingfisher (m) on Bonchurch Pond.
20th. Clouded Yellow and a pair of Stonechats along the revetment.
22nd. St. Catherine's Hill with Pete. One Black Redstart plus Yellowhammers, Goldfinches, Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, Stonechats, Linnets and a Stoat. Also lots of Field Mushrooms which were excellent eating over the next few days!
25th. A Firecrest in the garden briefly.
27th. 2 Black Redstarts, 10 Stonechats, 2 Chiffchaffs and a Sparrowhawk on Bembridge Down.
29th-30th. South-westerly gale and heavy rain. Stayed in.

November

2nd. A severe south-south westerly storm last night.
3rd. Another ghastly day!
4th. HBHM, a Painted Lady, 3 Red Admirals and the Stonechats back after the storm, all along the revetment. A dead Dolphin in Monk's Bay.
6th. A male Pheasant in the garden. 7 Red Admirals and a Painted Lady all on one patch of Buddleia.
6 Brent Geese flying west past home.
7th. Pair of Ravens along the revetment.
10th. Stonechats busy feeding on caterpillars. A dead Kestrel on Monk's Bay beach and also the tentacle of a Portuguese Man of War.
11th. 6 Red Admirals and a Silver Y moth along the revetment. An 18 metre cruiser caught fire and sank about 4 miles out off home.
13th. 6 Gannets and 4 Kittiwakes west off home.
15th. 8 Red Admirals and one peacock in the garden.
21st. A late Swallow early am heading west. Male and female Blackcaps in the garden feeding on Rowan berries.
25th. Little Egret fishing in the rocks by Wheeler's Bay.
27th. A Purple Sandpiper on the breakwater at Bonchurch.
29th. 4 Oystercatchers and a Little Egret on the rocks at Bonchurch.
30th. A terrible day; NE wind, very cold and raining.


Left: *Cruiser fire off Ventnor;* ***Right:*** *Raven*

December

2nd. Went to W. Cowes with Pete to see a Hooded Crow. Only the second I have ever seen here in the Island. Good views but rather foggy. Saw it dig up a walnut.

6th. 5 Oystercatchers along the revetment and the Kingfisher on Bonchurch Pond.
8th. Saw a HBHM fly across Bonchurch Pond. A Lesser Whitethroat in a patch of willow along the revetment.
11th. A major landslip along at Bonchurch last night.
12th. A Chiffchaff and a Blackcap in the garden.
13th. A young Grey Seal attempted to get ashore on the Wheeler's Bay slipway but failed. It then swam along to Ventnor Haven and went in there.
15th. A Red-throated Diver west off Bonchurch.
17th. A Chiffchaff in the garden.
22nd 2 Oystercatchers and 2 Herons along the revetment.
25th. 6 Brent Geese close in heading west.
27th. A steady movement of gannets heading west in the morning plus a Great-northern Diver.
28th. The Kingfisher still on Bonchurch pond.
31st.Very disturbed weather these last few days with gale force winds and a lot of rain. Not a very good end to the year.

Left: *Hooded Crow;* ***Middle:*** *Kingfisher;* ***Right:*** *Chiffchaff*

Andy Butler

General Meetings

Saturday 29th July Gatcombe walk with John Margham & Vicky Basford

About fifteen members met at Gatcombe church for a five mile walk around Gatcombe parish looking at the historic landscape, led by John Margham and Vicky Basford. The place-name of Gatcombe was first recorded in Domesday Book and means 'the valley where goats are kept'. Our walk was held on St Olave's day. Gatcombe is one of only three rural churches in southern England to be dedicated to St Olaf, king of Norway (d. 1030). Isabel Thompson explained the significance of the corbel reset over the porch, dating to the twelfth century. This date for the presence of the church is supported by documentary evidence that Gatcombe pre-dates Whitwell church. Gatcombe was a daughter church of Carisbrooke, which is evidenced by the pattern of parish boundaries in the area. We heard the Domesday Book entry for Gatcombe manor and then discussed documentary evidence for settlement and land use within the manor in the medieval and post-medieval periods. The Royal Survey of the Isle of Wight 1559-61 is an important source which has been supplemented by notes compiled by the late County Archivist, Clifford Webster.

We then walked south to Sheat which was an independent manor by 1086 although later coming under the control of Gatcombe Manor at various times. The site of the present manor house is a relocation from south of the road. We briefly followed a track eastward to the main road but were prevented from seeing the site of Faselham, adjoining the River Medina, due to the maize crop. Faselham was probably the site of Gatcombe mill in 1086. Gatcombe Withy Bed downstream from here has produced environmental evidence through prehistory into the early medieval period. At the ford to the south of the manor house we considered the place-names *Cotteford* and *Shetebroke*, both of which are potentially early topographical names. The lane northwards from the ford was the main road towards Carisbrooke, until it was rerouted around the east side of Gatcombe Park in the nineteenth century.

Proceeding towards Newbarn Farm we noted that the plateau area to the south of the street settlement of Gatcombe was probably formerly open field land. The Portable Antiquities Scheme has recorded late Iron Age staters (coins), much Romano-British material, and some early Anglo-Saxon artefacts. We continued to the coombe to the south of Newbarn Farm. This has produced a similar range of material, including eighth century coins. It was formerly known as *Bretecombe,* possibly meaning the coombe of the Britons. Newbarn Farm itself is not recorded in the Royal Survey of 1559-61, the earliest reference to the farm being in 1757 and the present farmhouse dating from 1793. From Newbarn Farm we ascended a downland path leading westward. The downs now known as Newbarn Down and Garstons Down were formerly part of the larger area of Gatcombe Down where tenants of Gatcombe Manor had rights of common for sheep in the mid-sixteenth century.

From Garstons Down we had an excellent view of the Gatcombe area. The Domesday population of at least 27 households appear to have lived in the valley below. Settlement shift from the plateau to the south can be envisaged into an area of formerly rough pasture, which ties in with the place-name. Further along this path we were treated to an extensive view northwards and westwards. The importance of the Bowcombe valley as a 'central place' for the Island was highlighted, with the Bowcome Down early Anglo-Saxon cemetery site which become an assembly place, the manorial centre at Bowcombe, the eighth-century market site downstream, and further on, Carisbrooke, our first town with its market evidenced in Domesday Book and its minster church serving an extensive area. We descended to a former chalk pit to have our lunch before looking at Garstons Farm. This holding is not recorded in the sixteenth-century Royal Survey and the place-name first occurs on the 1793 Ordnance Survey drawing as 'Gaston Down' The farmhouse is probably of nineteenth-century origin although a barn is marked on the 1793 drawing.

Continuing towards Veyers, we walked part of the Carisbrooke/ Gatcombe parish boundary. The complicated pattern of detached portions of Gatcombe parish within Carisbrooke as mapped in the mid-nineteenth century was pointed out, which define former open field furlongs and provide evidence for Gatcombe parish being formerly part of Carisbrooke. The extensive estate centred on Bowcombe manor would have been coterminous with Carisbrooke's mother parish. The process of fragmentation was well developed by 1086 as shown by the number of independent manors by this date, but later evidence, including that of the 1559/60 Royal Survey can be cited to support its reconstruction.

Continuing back towards Gatcombe, we saw evidence of quarrying in the linear cliff face. Stone from here was used in building work at Carisbrooke Castle and would have been transported via Dark Lane. Beyond the new vineyard site we again had a fine view of Gatcombe and its environs. The Domesday Book statistics for hidage, ploughlands and ploughteams for both Gatcombe and Sheat imply an increase in arable land use leading up to and beyond 1086.

On returning to the church, themes for the day were summarised and an overview provided for the development of the adjoining parkland around Gatcombe House in the later eighteenth century and nineteenth century.

John Margham and Vicky Basford

Saturday 30 September Prehistoric Cave Art by Alan Phillips

Alan began his talk by introducing his audience of 21 members to several key books by authorities on prehistoric cave art, which he displayed on a table and invited us to look at after he had finished speaking. He has been particularly influenced by the theories of archaeologist David Lewis-Williams, author of the book '*The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art'*.

Alan first became interested in cave art when he visited the famous caves at Lascaux in south-western France. The original had to be closed to the public in the 1960s because so many people came to see the cave art that it was being damaged; tourists are now ushered in their thousands through an incredibly accurate replica.

Lewis-Williams was keen to discover the answer to this pivotal question: why did prehistoric people crawl through narrow tunnels, deep in cave networks, to paint pictures, with only a tallow candle for light? Some archaeologists have resisted coming to conclusions about this until they have all the data, but it is

impossible to make observations or interpret the relevant data without some theory in mind. Known as parietal art, cave paintings depict wild animals, humans, and occasionally figures with wild animal heads and human bodies, which may be sorcerers: one example was discovered in Les Trois Frères Cave in south-west France. Then there are hand prints, the palm placed on the rock and spray-painted over, and displays of signs or symbols. When, in 1879, a girl first found paintings of bison in Altamira cave in Northern Spain, experts accused the owner of the land of fraud. Yet many years later, Picasso saw these paintings and declared that no artist alive then could paint so well.

Cave art is extraordinarily difficult to date, and dates are constantly being revised backwards. The most successful means of dating cave art is through carbon-dating, which strongly suggests a period from about forty-five thousand years ago, when Homo sapiens emerged in Europe, to about eleven thousand years ago. More recently, some newly discovered Spanish cave paintings have been dated to sixty-five thousand years ago, and made by Neanderthals, long before humans came on the scene.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, theories emerged that the cave paintings represented some kind of magic, such as giving hunters power over their prey to make it easier to kill them. Some of the animals depicted, however, were not animals that the hunters wished to kill, top predators like lions and tigers, for example. Different species dominated in different caves. Another theory is of sacred or symbolic intentions. The most dangerous animals were found in the further recesses of a cave, and it is right to say that the caves were organized into patterns.

Alan stressed that cave art should not be seen as the by-product of *something else*, whether ecological stress, or social stress at the onset of glaciation: it is an essential part of the human aesthetic. In his book 'Sapiens, a Brief History of Humankind', Yuval Noah Harari identified a cognitive revolution in Homo sapiens about fifty thousand years ago. There is a need to assess what was happening to the human mind at this period. Some archaeologists are uneasy about this and deride what they consider to be 'palaeopsychology', but David Lewis-Williams feels that their thinking is too narrow and that our view of the past is too much rooted in our own experience. He argues that the cognitive revolution in Western Europe allows for conceptions of an 'alternative reality'. There is a range of dream-like states that can shift consciousness, not just in sleep, but induced by substances. Lewis-Williams thinks this can explain many features of cave art. The theory goes that the prehistoric Shaman, a healer and psychotherapist, used altered states of consciousness, often helped by animal spirits and cross-dressing. Before moving to cave art, Lewis-Williams studied the rock paintings of the San Bushmen of southern Africa. Half of the men and a third of the women are shamans. The great medicine or trance dance is the central religious experience of San life and pervades all of their rock art. The walls of rock on which they paint images are the gateway between this world and the spirit world.

Lewis-Williams questions accepted theories of the origins of cave painting. To the question: Did rock art evolve from body art or some talented individual? Lewis-Williams gives an emphatic No. He notes that only some kinds of animals are depicted. People did not *invent* two-dimensional images of things around them, as we would understand it; rather, the artists were projecting onto the walls images they already had in their minds. And the pictures are not supposed to be real animals, but figurative. As for the geometric motifs, some rock panels are densely covered in them. Alan showed us a slide with pictures of horses covered in spots. There is also finger fluting – many fingers are run through the mud, then the image of an animal is drawn over them.

Other theories are that women were more dominant than men in spiritual observance, and many who study cave art think that most of the hand prints are those of women, and that light and darkness feature strongly in this art. The paintings would appear quite different in the light of the prehistoric candle-lamps. To induce a trance, flat pieces of bone or wood were swung through the air to make a loud noise, accompanied by drumming and clapping.

It is very difficult to interpret the wounded men images – individuals pierced by many lines to represent arrows – but Lewis-Williams conjectures that the artists who painted these figures had themselves probably experienced the pricking sensations of trance. This suggests that these pictures were not meant to be realistic images, but figurative. And it relates to another question, as to why *people* were painted so badly, when the artists were able to draw such sophisticated images of bison and horses? – maybe because it wasn't important to them to portray humans in any detail, as they are not what showed up in the trance states.

In Lascaux Cave, discovered in 1940, there are over a thousand paintings. The cave is divided into seven sections, different rituals being performed in different areas. The Hall of Bulls, a large elliptical chamber, may well have been the prehistoric entrance. Here the remains of scaffolding were found, used to paint high up the rock wall. A unicorn is depicted with seven horses and four or five red deer stags. Another picture is of a roaring stag, with a tawny horse facing it. The falling horse is described as one of the most striking images. Other chambers are the Apse, the Nave, the Chamber of the Felines and the Shaft. The Nave is a long chamber with a high ceiling and lamps were found on the ledge. Here you can see monumental images of horses, bison and a row of deer, as well as grid shapes. In the Chamber of the Felines there are images of big cats. You descend into the Shaft with a depiction of an animal that could be a bison charging, with lowered head and raised tail, and a man. A phallic man is falling backwards. One acceptable interpretation is that this is a hunting expedition gone wrong; but a shamanic interpretation might indicate a transformation by death, with the 'death' of the man paralleling the 'death' of the bison.

After the talk, members of the audience were keen to ask questions. Then we thanked Alan for researching and sharing with us this fascinating subject that brings to life the interconnected creative and spiritual lives of our far-distant ancestors.

Maggie Nelmes

Saturday 14 October Tiger, Lord of the Forest by Tracy Dove

We welcomed Tracy Dove, former Keeper of tigers at Sandown Zoo, to give us a talk about tigers in the wild. Tracy has travelled to India to study tigers and their conservation in the wild, and she is keen to pass on her knowledge of these fascinating big cats through the educational organization that she has founded, 'Zoologica'.

Indians recognize the importance of tigers in conservation, culture and religion. There is only one species of tiger in existence in the world: *Panthera tigris*, and two subspecies: *Panthera tigris tigris* in mainland Asia and *Panthera tigris sondaica* in the Greater Sunda Islands in Indonesia. Each tiger has its own unique markings so you can identify individuals. There is a misconception that white tigers are from Siberia, because there they would blend in with the snow and ice, but there is no logic to this theory because in summer there is no snow in Siberia and white tigers would stand out. White tigers are, in fact, Indian. A genetic condition known as lucism, this white colouring is not a good adaptation for a wild tiger, as they are too visible.

Tigers need forest to survive. They have become well adapted to take full advantage of the benefits of their habitat to their survival. Their stripes break up their outline and blend in with the shadows. They are very good at keeping still and quiet, at melting into the background. This is how they hunt because they prey on animals that can outrun them over long distances. Tigers are good sprinters so they need their prey to come close enough that they can launch a surprise attack. They are very well adapted for hunting at night, having amazing night vision. Their eyes have more rods than cones, for mainly black and white vision, and light that comes in is reflected back out. The pads on their paws are cushioned, and they move stealthily, in flowing motion, like domestic cats. Even so, they are successful in getting only one kill in twenty attempts.

Their claws are retractable, about an inch long and very thick and curved. They kill by biting the jugular vein at the back of the neck. Tigers hunt on their own. They need very strong teeth with massive roots. Incisors are for nibbling, used to pull out feathers, for example. Their back teeth are carnassial. They are pointed and act like scissors to slice through tough hide. Tigers use their rough tongue to lick the skin off the meat. They have to gobble their food, before other hungry animals smell the carcass and tackle them for it, working in pairs or packs.

Female tigers have their own territory which in India is about ten square km, but in Siberia about two hundred square km. Female territories are often adjacent to each other. Male territories are, however, much larger, and often incorporate several female territories. Tigers are loner hunters and not sociable animals. Male and female will avoid each other, except if the female is in oestrus, as face to face contact can cause conflict. To signal non-aggression, they make a churring sound.

Tigers of both sexes use scent marking to define their territory, by spraying their urine on tree trunks and scraping the ground with their front paws, where they have scent glands between their toes. Male tigers

spray a concentrated form of urine from their anal gland, known as stink-marking to send a powerful warning to any would-be challenger to keep out.

When a male tiger detects a female within his territory in oestrus, he will approach her carefully. This encounter can lead to aggression if the female is not yet receptive, and the female could be killed. Once they have mated, the male disappears, taking no part in the raising of the young. Male tigers can breed at only two or three years old, and young tigers will try to snatch territory from older, less strong males.

After giving birth, the female has to leave her cubs in a safe place while she hunts for food, but she doesn't go far. If a male discovers them, he will kill them to bring the female back into oestrus so that he can mate with her. The cubs are weaned onto meat, which the mother brings them, and she teaches them to hunt. They don't develop their teeth until the age of fourteen to fifteen months, and they stay with their mother until they are at least eighteen months old. She may give her female cubs part of her territory, but the male juveniles need to move right away from the male tiger's territory to avoid conflict.

Human population growth has encroached on the forests of Asia, putting tigers at greater risk of conflict with humans. Tigers used to live right across Asia, from Turkey to the Far East. In Queen Victoria's reign, there were a hundred thousand wild tigers on the planet; now there are only about four thousand. At least now we know the drivers for this sharp decline. These are: depletion of their forest habitat – loss and degradation – as the human population increases and land just outside national parks is cleared for settlements; prey depletion due to habitat loss, poaching and snaring by poor families, and competition with livestock grazing; hunting for tiger body parts for Chinese medicine and the trade in skins. Tigers are hunted, poisoned and snared. Poachers don't make much money, but gang bosses do. It is hard to prosecute them because of their association with corrupt politicians; climate change is damaging tiger habitat - mangrove in the swamps at the mouth of the Ganges, for example.

In India, a number of problems have been identified, and remedial action is being taken to protect tiger populations and keep them healthy:

- Habitat protection by law, through national park status - The relocation of villages away from tiger reserves has to be done with the consent of the villagers. They are well compensated financially, and are mostly desperate to move to areas with modern houses, facilities such as healthcare, and better employment opportunities. But it is important to ensure that they are not cheated by corrupt officials;
- Protection from inbreeding, causing genetic weakness – isolated habitats need to be joined up, by providing corridors through which tigers can pass, safe from human interference.
- Protection from poachers – Forest guards are very well trained. They live in the forest, away from their families. But often their wages are not paid for months, which can lay them open to receiving bribes;
- Education in schools about the importance of tiger conservation and the inefficacy of traditional Chinese Medicine.

Tiger farms are fueling demand for body parts for Chinese medicine. They are threatening the survival of tigers in the wild because it is not possible to tell whether the body parts are from captive or wild tigers. Therefore, poached tigers can easily be passed off as farmed tigers. A lot of tiger farms claim to be conservationist, but their tigers are inbred and cannot be returned to the wild, even if that were the true motivation. This is a smokescreen for a cruel trade, where highly intelligent tigers are kept in small cages without space to exercise or mental stimulation, causing them great stress. Some Buddhist temples breed tigers for body parts, but the monks are adept at deceiving tourists into thinking they are visiting a zoo. They pay to pose for selfies with the tiger cubs.

After Tracy had answered a number of questions from our audience, we thanked her for a very enlightening talk.

Maggie Nelmes

Saturday 11th November Recorders Conference

As usual, we had a good attendance for our Recorder's Conference and two excellent speakers.

Jamie Marsh (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust) was our first keynote speaker sharing progress, successes and lessons learned so far on the Trust's two re-wilding sites on the Island – Duxmore and Nunwell Estate. It was excellent to hear the about diversity of species and habitats these sites are supporting since the pressure of farming has been removed from the land. Jamie also showed us the East Wight cluster of HIWWT reserves map and aspirations to connect these up in the future when opportunities may arise.

Just ahead of the break, Paul Davies (National Trust) introduced us to a new project 'White Cliffs and White Chalk Species Recovery Project' which aims to support the recovery of specialist flora and fauna in two iconic landscapes, the White Cliffs of Dover and Isle of Wight, thanks to funding from Natural England. Paul is working on monitoring key species linked to chalk grassland habitats: Early Gentian, Yarrow and Ox-tongue Broomrape, Glanville Fritillary, Potter Flower Bee, Cliff Furrow Bee, White Spot Moth and Dew Moth.

Refreshing tea and delicious cakes baked by Newport Country Market followed with the opportunity to catch-up with fellow recorders and browse pre-loved nature books and publications.

Following the interval, Theo Vickers 'Into the Wild Seas' presentation was jam packed with dazzling underwater images taken by Theo himself from around the coastal waters of the Island. Theo is currently studying an Msc Marine Vertebrate Ecology and Conservation and made the journey back to the Island to speak at the conference for which we are very grateful. Theo's talk provided delegates with a glimpse into the incredible diversity that the intertidal waters of the Island support as well as highlighting the importance of species recording, and the impacts he has witnessed due to warming seas, extreme weather and human pressures.
It's well worth exploring Theo's breathtaking website It is well worth exploring Theo's breathtaking website: https://theovickersmarinewildlife.co.uk/

Finally, Matthew spoke briefly on Ian Boyd's behalf about the Government's Local Nature Recovery Strategy and how this being taken forward on the Island.

We would like to thank our speakers for their inspiring, engaging and thought provoking presentations; to all delegates attending; and to all Society members and other volunteers who keep the whole event running – see you next year!

Tina Whitmore

Saturday 9th December Moths of the Isle of Wight by Jim Baldwin

Some thirty members gathered at Arreton Community Centre for this talk. Jim began with some statistics telling us that over 2,500 species of moth have been recorded in the UK of which some 1,800 species have been recorded on the Island, comprising 723 macro- and 1,093 micro-moths.

The Reddish buff moth (*Acosmetia caliginosa*) is now found in only one location in the UK, at Cranmore on the Isle of Wight. There are also local populations scattered through Europe. Its name comes from the striking colour of some males of the species. It favours sparse vegetation in open habitat (heathland and moorland), surrounded by mature scrub or sunny, sheltered woodland rides. Its larval foodplant is Saw-wort, whose status is common, and which favours chalky soils. Saw-wort grows only in England and Wales, especially in the South-west, on unimproved hay meadows and grassland, and on woodland edges. The Reddish Buff moth is on the wing in May and June.

Micro-moths come in various sizes. Notable species found on the Island include the Isle of Wight Piercer (*Grapholita gemmiferana*) found by the coast, with a short flight period; there is a need to survey it

every year. The Green Longhorn (*Adela reaumuvella*) attracts females with antenna that are longer than its body.

Rare moth species include the Dew moth, a coastal species whose caterpillars feed on lichen. The male flies by day and at dusk, and the female flies at dusk and during the night. It has been recorded at only three sites in the UK. More research will be carried out on the Island into this species, which emerges in late April/early May and can be found until late June/July. The Ringed Border is only found at Osborne. Fifteen were found this year. It is a migrant, but there is evidence that it is breeding here. This is only the second county in the UK where this species has been recorded. The Barred Tooth-striped, has not been recorded here since 2019, for various possible reasons: the Covid pandemic, bad weather and a shortage of recorders. The Beautiful Gothic, can be found on the south coast of the Island and has good populations. The Scarce Merveille du Jour, had not been found for many years until it was recorded in 2021 and 2022. It had not been noticed before. *Coleophora viticella*, attaches its larval case to a Dyer's Greenweed stalk, as the caterpillars feed on it. An annual survey is carried out at one of the sites. Only two counties in the UK have a population of this very rare species.

Jim then talked about the many different colours, shapes and patterns of moths. Some blend in with their surroundings, while others are brightly coloured. The Buff-Tip moth is colourful when in flight, but at rest, with wings folded, it looks like a stick. Moths are masters of camouflage. When at rest, the Pale Prominent looks like a piece of rough wood. Another species resembles a Chinese written character.

Moths can be found in all habitats, some species in only one, others in a variety. The peak time is in June/July, when there are plenty of food plants and the grass is long for them to hide in. But you can see certain species at other times of year. The December moth has a chunky body, with what looks like a black fur coat but is in fact long scales. It is one of the few moths that can survive on the wing in cold weather in late autumn and early winter. Its body scales keep it warm and it has anti-freeze inside its body. Therefore, its muscles do not stiffen and it can fly at low temperatures. Some species pf moths are active at night and some by day. Surprisingly, there are some 125 species of day-flying moths in the UK.

You can observe some species in the daytime or use a trap by night. A white sheet and a torch will do. Early lepidopterists developed a sugaring technique - coating a tree trunk with a sugar solution - to attract certain species. Jim showed us slides of several traps: the large Robinson design from the 1950s, the light and portable Heath trap, which runs on a battery, and the Skinner trap which is a mixture of the two. This has perspex lids with egg boxes inside for the moths to rest in, which is good to have at an event, to pass the egg boxes around.

Jim said that it is important to record caterpillar sightings, as well as those of adult moths. All moths start out as eggs and larvae, and the health of each species depends on their particular habitat providing enough food and shelter for their caterpillars. This stage of development can last just a few weeks in some species and all winter in others. The larvae of some species of micro-moth live inside leaves and feed on their tissue. Each species can be identified by the pattern they make in the leaf.

The top three recorded moths on the Island are the Large Yellow Underwing, Silver Y and Willow Beauty. The results from the nationwide Rothamsted Insect Survey show an average 33% decrease in abundance of larger moths over the past fifty years (1968 to 2017). Losses have been greater in the South of England (29%) than in the northern half (22%). This could be due to global temperature rise.

On the Island, the Jersey Tiger Moth is a success story. Its abundance has doubled in the past ten years. Thirty years ago, a sighting of this day-flying moth was rare on the Island. It moved first into Cornwall, before spreading across the whole of Southern England. This is most likely due to global heating. The Box Tree Moth is an invasive species, first recorded on the Island in 2012 at Bonchurch. It spread to Europe from South-east Asia, with imports of box trees, popular with gardeners for hedging. The larvae feed on various species of box. It was first recorded in Britain in Kent in 2007, and has spread very rapidly across South-east England, even to Central London. It has been sighted in Wales, and, in 2018, was reported to be in Scotland. The caterpillars can disfigure a box topiary and, in high concentrations, strip an entire box hedge of its leaves. Primary migrant moths are now found along the south and south-east coasts, having flown there across the Channel.

Moths are important because they are an essential part of the food chain, providing food for birds, bats, hedgehogs and amphibians and they are pollinators, enabling many wildflowers, including several native orchids, to reproduce.

Jim is Butterfly and Moth Recorder for the Island and would welcome more help with recording moths If you are interested, please contact him and he will help you to get started. His details are in our IWNHAS programme, under Section Leaders - Ornithology. We thanked Jim for a very interesting and inspiring talk.

Maggie Nelmes

Looking at the Countryside

Tuesday 15th July Knowles Farm

It was a perfect weather when nine members met at the Windy Corner carpark on the Old Blackgang Road, Niton. We looked at the Imposing feature of Gore Cliff and a Peregrine Falcon was spotted perched on a corner of the cliff. It was interesting to note that in a forward of an early edition of Fred Mews 'The Back of the Wight' he talks about seeing both a Peregrine and a Raven and in one of the last editions he reviews changes the area, one of which is the loss of both species. Fortunately, both species have returned but at the loss of the prolific dove colonies that inhabited the cliff during their absence.

The upperparts of Knowles Farm have not yet been grazed this season and the chalk flora around the 'Humpits' was looking particularly fine as we walked through this area and along the ridge, with god numbers of pyramid orchid, agrimony and an abundance of restharrow. We talked about the concrete cairns around that site which are part of an ongoing study by Kingston University to assess changing levels in the landscape over several decades.

From here we walked down towards the coast and discussed how the coast has been a place of much occupation through the centuries with artifacts being found on the eroding cliff edge with good example of Romano British and Medieval ceramics having be recovered from the cliffs over the years.

We visited the aerial base that was used when Guglielmo Marconi used Knowles Farm as a centre for his experiments in the development of radio at the turn of the 20th century.

We followed a circular route that took us pass Watershoot Bay, back up the lighthouse road where we talked about the development of the lighthouses in the area and changes over the years of the St Catherines operation. We returned via the valley through the 'Humpits' and admired the attractiveness of the rock outcrops that had once been part of Gore Cliff

The entire Undercliff, between Blackgang and Ventnor, is an area of great change, not just because of a dynamic geomorphology but also because of human development and the loss of agriculture leading to the establishment of woodland that can now be seen today. Knowles Farm is probably the best example of what the Undercliff looked like, as seen in paintings and old photos. Maintaining this is a challenge but the excitement of this place lies in the fact that it is always changing.

Tony Tutton

Wednesday 16th August Chessell

On a hot sunny day, four members met at Chessell for a walk up to Brighstone Forest, noting a large field of Red Clover planted for the second year running. An excellent nitrogen fixer, this plant is also used in many herbal remedies. There were several late summer flowers along the track to Westover Down, mainly Rosebay and Greater Willowherb and Hemp Agrimony, attracting a Jersey Tiger Moth among several species of butterfly. The view west to Tennyson Down was stunning as we walked down to the road, Brook Hill House on our left and on our right some of the chain of Bronze Age barrows that lie along the

Tennyson Trail, both covered by Alan Phillips' walk in June and published in the Bulletin. It is thought there might be a Jutish settlement somewhere in the Forest.

On the steep climb to the top of Brook Down we noted several typical chalk grassland flowers, including the rare Clustered Bellflower. We walked downhill to briefly join the Hamstead Trail, before turning right into the welcome shade of the woods to follow a track down to the road, a short diversion taking us to pause for a moment at the poignant memorial to the 47 passengers and crew tragically killed when an Aquila flying boat crashed into Shalcombe chalk pit in 1957. On reaching the road, two of us abandoned plans for coffee at the Pottery and gratefully accepted Alan's invitation to coffee at his and Renella's home in Shorwell, where we had our picnic lunch in their lovely garden.

Mary Edmunds

Tuesday 7th November Shanklin

Our walk started at St. Blasius church, Shanklin, the only church named after him in the UK. Conflicting information tells us that he is the saint of sore throats or wool combers. Ten people enjoyed Sibden Hill, then we walked on to Tinker's Hollow in America Wood, where Jill produced photos of the time it was a tea garden. This is the only wood on our Island owned by the Woodland Trust. We saw several interesting fungi, not able to name them for certain with no expert among us. We walked on a carpet of sweet chestnuts. When we arrived at Apse Manor we studied the reprint of the first edition of the one-inch O/S map which shows clearly the path from Apse Manor to Apse Heath; alas, this good route was not put on the map. We walked parts of eight different rights of way, Sandown Shanklin SS, and Newchurch NC paths. We returned for a little distance along the disused railway cycle track. It was a beautiful day, and we all fitted on the log seating for a rest in the warm sunshine before returning to the pond by the church without needing to retrace our steps.

Jill Green

Saturday 2nd December Quarr

Five people braved freezing fog to meet at Quarr Abbey for the last LATC meeting of the year. We agreed to return in summer to explore the wild flower and butterfly meadow which was created some years ago. We walked past the pigs, reared by Matt Legge, who also keeps sheep and cattle in some of the Abbey fields. We admired the beautiful brickwork of the Benedictine abbey built at the turn of the 20th century and visited the 'secret' little chapel opened in recent years for quiet contemplation. Passing some majestic Monterey Pines we caught a glimpse of a red squirrel on the woodland walk and were inspected by a plump red robin. Butchers Broom and Foetid Iris were indicators that this was a remnant of ancient woodland.

Clumps of Mistletoe on the Poplar trees stood out in the winter light on Coronation Avenue (FP.4a), formerly known as Elm Lane. A new interpretation board tells the history of the Cistercian abbey destroyed by Henry the V111 in 1132, and we saw the ancient oak where roots entwine the ruins of the old infirmary chapel. FP.45 passed the old quarries from which Quarr probably got its name. Stone from these quarries was used in the construction of both Winchester and Chichester Cathedral. Stopping briefly to look at the lovely cones of the Himalayan Spruce, we entered Holy Cross Church and the welcome warmth of a cake and coffee morning. A member of the church described some of the windows to us and on leaving we looked at some of the interesting gravestones, one of poor Thomas Sivell who was hanged as a smuggler but later found to have been innocent.

Leaving the church, I pointed out the Sheela-na-gigg, believed to date from the 13th century, an ancient symbol once reputed to have been known as the Idol and worshipped by the local community. Thought by some to have been a fertility symbol, Alan Phillips suggested by contrast that in the medieval period such grotesque carvings on the extremities of the church were more likely to have been a warning - follow the church's central teaching or this is how you will end up! We walked briskly back to the abbey, passing an impressive clump of spindle laden with

attractive pink berries. After visiting a Christmas fair in the grounds of the abbey, three of the party stayed for a welcome lunch in the warmth of the café before catching a bus back to Newport.

Mary Edmunds

Archaeology

Mottistone Estate Project

New opportunities continue to arise. We were granted permission by Historic England to carry out a geophysical survey on Castle Hill, a scheduled site near the Longstone. As far as we know, such a survey has not been done before; in fact, there is a dearth of research evidence from a site that raises many questions. The site commands impressive views in all directions and is enclosed by a rough rectangle of banks and ditches. Dating suggestions include Iron Age, Roman or Medieval. Possible uses include settlement, hillfort, signalling station, stock enclosure. Yet lack of investigation has frustrated attempts to come to firm conclusions. So, this was an important opportunity for us and, as the licence, was time limited, it became our main focus through the summer months.

The hill, like the surrounding area, was planted with trees until the 1987 storm, when fallen trees and ground clearance caused some damage but left the earthworks visible until the brambles, nettles and other growth took over. It was a challenging site to work on; The National Trust cleared the vegetation as much as possible, revealing a rough uneven slope pockmarked with holes from tree clearance and cattle trampling. We were very fortunate that two of our members, Alan and Chris Fisher, offered to help with their Land Rover and Jeep for transporting equipment and people to the site.

We now have results from Gradiometer and Resistivity and are in the process of producing a report. Whilst not offering help with dating, the results show features of interest and we hope Historic England will allow further investigation.

Work on the ruined cottage has been completed for this season, although we may return to explore further. As we turned to finds processing in the autumn the wet weather restricted outdoor cleaning and sorting but we managed to record everything indoors. We have an almost complete record of who lived in the cottage and some additional detail about some of them. The interim report has been passed to the National Trust and includes a significant section about lives of the occupants.

There are two jobs still to be done. When we sorted the pieces of chimney pot it was realised there were 2 or 3 separate pots, which seems excessive for a cottage of this size. We have also found enough metal from stoves to learn something about heating and cooking; this was one of the aims of the survey. Probably the most thrilling and unexpected discovery was a bread oven built into the wall of the cottage, probably part of the original construction. This is a significant find; many similar cottages of that era would have possessed such a feature and its survival is important.

Castle Hill and the ruined cottage were the main foci of the walk in August which is reported elsewhere.

At the end of September, the 5 members of our group sharing the management for this work met with representatives from the National Trust – Robin Lang, the Island Countryside Manager, and James Brown, Regional Archaeologist. They are very pleased with our work so far and we discussed future plans. We took James to Castle Hill and the ruined cottage and had very helpful discussions. Plans have been made to cover the bread oven temporarily to avoid damage during the winter. James is particularly interested in the cottage as it gives insights into lives of ordinary people rather than those who owned the grand houses.

Working inside the cottage (M Cotterill)

Excavating the bread oven (M Cotterill)

Helen Jackson

Saturday August 19th **Mottistone Estate walk**

The dozen people who met at Mottistone Manor car park on a bright, balmy morning were fortunate to have missed the storms of the previous day. Helen began by explaining that the National Trust had asked us to carry out an archaeological survey of the Mottistone estate prior to re-wilding after which some areas will become overgrown. The priorities would be field-walking and metal-detecting (by 3 designated detectorists) on suitable sites with geophysics and possible excavation where appropriate, accompanied by desk-based research. The land was still being farmed so access was restricted to narrow time windows. Helen showed a map of the field system but explained that not all fields would offer suitable conditions for field-walking. Metal detecting has already produced interesting finds including Roman and Iron Age coinage. However, since the project began the National Trust has asked us to carry out further investigations and they would be the main focus of this walk.

In the 1990s, Chris Currie carried out an extensive survey of the estate, cataloguing sites and features. He noted that several trackways converged on Mottistone common, where we would be heading. The deep track up to the Longstone is a 'hollow way' and is probably very ancient. Unlike many of the tracks, he pointed out that it is too narrow for livestock droving so was only for people to walk up.

As we walked past the dip that lies north of the Manor gardens, we were looking at the 'shearing field' one of the reasons for the trackways. We stopped by the Longstone to look from a distance at some of the fields already walked and at the landscape. David Marshall has been using computer technology and showed evidence for several barrows that are not listed on the Heritage Environment Record (HER). This is another research opportunity awaiting us.

We then walked downhill past Longstone Cottage to the ruin in the small copse surrounded by barbed wire. Several people commented how often they had walked here and never known this cottage existed. Helen explained some of the known facts from, for example, maps, census and baptism records. Many of these details will be available later in the final report.

Everyone enjoyed exploring the ruined cottage and the outbuilding we have uncovered. There was much discussion about what the latter could have been used for. In the cottage the bread oven was of particular interest. This had been an unexpected discovery although typical of the period, built into the wall at the said of an inglenook fireplace.

We then walked up to Castle Hill, which was pegged out into 16 x 20metre squares for our geophysics survey. As the National Trust has cut back the thick masses of brambles and other vegetation it was a good opportunity to see the perimeter bank and get a sense of the internal enclosure. Whilst geophysics is unlikely to provide dating evidence directly, a number of features could potentially offer clues to how the site was used. It was pointed out that whether this was Iron Age, Roman, medieval or constructed in some other period, use could have extended over a much longer timespan, leading to a palimpsest of anomalies for the geophysics to pick up.

David Marshall then talked about the wider landscape and possible settlement patterns nearer the coast. He pointed out some of the fields we have already investigated and what they have revealed. Again, this will be detailed in later reports.

Inside the cottage (P. Jackson)

On Castle Hill (M. Cotterill)

Helen Jackson

Saturday 18th November The Neanderthals

Delian began and ended her talk with stunning recent satellite images of deep space as examples of how far our knowledge is expanding. But there is still much to learn closer to home and recent discoveries about the Neanderthals are examples, much of it based on DNA and other scientific research.

There is evidence of 3 species of hominid from the lower paleolithic, (the early stone age) – Homo sapiens, Neanderthals and Denisovans. But DNA is now producing faint evidence of other hominids who may have existed at the same time. It is now well known that most modern humans outside Africa carry some Neanderthal DNA, evidence of interbreeding, and we saw a map showing the percentages of archaic DNA in modern populations across the world. The term comes from the valley of the River Neander in Germany where they were first identified. Images based on the remains have led to the popular view of an uncouth creature that is now being overturned.

The earliest art found in Europe dates from before the arrival of Homo sapiens and was found at sites associated with Neanderthals. In Spain cave paintings dating from about 64 thousand years ago show markings and symbols we cannot interpret but they must have had significance. Images of animals can be seen and it has been suggested that rows of dots could indicate a hunting calendar. In France, dots and lines, described as 'finger fluting' on cave walls have now been dated by optically stimulated luminescence to about 57 thousand years ago. And there is evidence of care and possible ritual associated with some burials; for example, flowers or shells being interred with bodies.

A comparison of Neanderthal and Homo Sapiens skeletons showed distinct differences, but were they all alike and did they change over thousands of years? DNA evidence suggests they had white eyeballs like us and were probably not dark-skinned. They were highly skilled in making flint tools and some of the hand axes are beautiful: did they appreciate this?

A little evidence for other artefact making has survived. Courtesy of Joy Verrinder, we could hold a replica double-ended wooden spear, about 2m long. Marks on teeth were probably caused by holding materials during processing. And it seems they used toothpicks!

On the Isle of Wight, worked flints, scrapers, borers and axes have been found, for example at Bleak Down, Priory Bay and Great Pan Farm, often associated with ancient river gravels where they would have camped.

We still don't know why they disappeared between 40,000 and 30,000 BP after existing for about 400,000 years. It is possible that numbers were never high although they covered a vast area from Europe to parts of Asia. Perhaps low numbers and/or a limited gene pool left them at a disadvantage as Homos Sapiens spread across the northern hemisphere.

Helen Jackson

Ornithology

Saturday 1st July at Newport

Fourteen members of IWNHAS and the Facebook social media group Wight Swifts met for an evening Swift walk, coinciding with the start of National Swift Awareness Week, jointly led by Caroline Dudley and Jim Baldwin. Starting at Quay Street, Newport, the group observed a long-established pair of nest boxes on a house which is still thought to be occupied by one pair of Swifts. We then walked up the High Street to watch an active nest in the eaves above the TUI travel agents shop. There were several visits to the nest with adults bringing food while our presence staring up at the nest site attracted a lot of attention from the passing general public, several of whom stayed to watch! We then concluded the walk at the County Records Office at Hillside where another active nest was seen. Unfortunately, the recent weather had forced the screaming parties of immature Swifts seen a few evenings earlier to temporarily depart to more settled climes. This was the first time a Swift walk had been arranged on the Isle of Wight and the positive response suggests this will become an annual event.

Jim Baldwin

Saturday 22nd July at Blackgang

Eight members met at Blackgang viewpoint car park for a walk led by Jim Baldwin. An overcast start, plus a forecast of heavy rain later in the morning, along with a strong south-westerly wind no doubt deterred some members from attending while the passerines mainly stayed hunkered down out of view. Four Herring Gulls and a Woodpigeon were observed from the cliff edge at Blackgang. As per last year's walk at this site, there was a large group of approx. 300 corvids (c.100 Jackdaw, c.180 Rook and c.20 Carrion Crow) in an adjacent field which had recently been cut. 6 Swallow and a singing Skylark braved the conditions and were the sum total of the passerines seen and heard. A pair of Raven treated us to a brief aerial display along the path at Gore Cliff while a Gannet was observed fishing off Rocken End along with 8 Herring Gulls. With the rain clouds gathering, we decided to retrace our steps at this point and managed to beat the rain. In addition to the birds, we also saw 2 Humming-bird Hawk-moths and several species of butterfly (6 Meadow Brown, 2 Marbled White and singles of Large White and Wall).

Jim Baldwin

Sunday 20th August at St Helens

Six members met at the bottom of Latimer Road for a walk led by Jackie Hart on a lovely sunny morning. Starting at St Helens Mill Pond, we recorded Greenshank and four Mediterranean Gulls among other species. Viewing Brading Marshes RSPB Reserve from St Helens road bridge produced good sightings of the pair of White-tailed Eagles as well as at least two Marsh Harriers. Two Great White Egret also gave great views and the opportunity to compare them to Little Egret. A bonus sighting was two Common Sandpipers, who had stopped off on their migration south to Africa, flying down the Eastern Yar and passing under the bridge to the Mill Pond. The walk along the footpath to Bembridge Lagoons was notable for the lack of migrant passerines seen with only three Chiffchaff recorded. A bonus at Bembridge Ponds was 26 Little Egret roosting in the trees. Returning along the Embankment, we were treated to close views of 10 Black-tailed Godwit, some still showing their summer plumage.

In total, 33 species were recorded during an enjoyable morning: Buzzard, Kestrel, Marsh Harrier, White-tailed Eagle, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Great White Egret, Little Egret, Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Mute Swan, Mallard, Coot, Tufted Duck, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Water Rail, Black-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Lapwing, Coal Tit, Woodpigeon, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Pied Wagtail, Robin, Wren, Chiffchaff and Swallow.

Jim Baldwin

Saturday 23rd September at Laundry Lane

Thirteen members met by the cattle sheds at Laundry Lane for a walk led by Dave Fairlamb of Natural Links. While waiting for the start of the event, several members saw a Marsh Harrier hunting over the reedbeds and after our introduction it was not long before we began to spot several species of birds in the

surrounding hedgerows and fields such as Common Whitethroats, Blackcaps, Linnets, Meadow Pipits and Greenfinches. At least 2 Cetti's Warblers gave small bursts of song as we walked further along the path.

Marsh Harrier Graeme Ruthven

Greenfinch Graeme Ruthven

Large numbers of Canada Geese were on the `Triangle Field', along with Grey Herons, several Mallards and at least 3 Shovelers. Overhead the sky was full of House Martins and Swallows, in their hundreds, with a few Sand Martins in amongst the feeding flocks. A few Gadwall took flight and it was at this point that a bird of prey was spotted drifting over the field, but then quickly flying away beyond a line of trees, it had all the hallmarks of a juvenile Pallid Harrier but we could have done with a more prolonged sighting for definitive ID.

One of the large pools out on the marsh held a Great Crested Grebe and at least 4 Little Grebes and several Lapwings were loafing around the edges. A Little Egret flew by in the distance and a Water Rail was heard `squealing'. Buzzards wheeled around overhead, catching the thermals and a Kestrel was seen hovering.

Little Grebe Graeme Ruthven

Kestrel Graeme Ruthven

Several species of butterfly were on the wing including Red Admirals, Small Whites, Speckled Woods and we all had lovely views of a Comma.

Dave Fairlamb

Sunday 22nd October at West High Down

Ten members met at the National Trust car park at the old chalk quarry near High Down for a walk led by Dave Fairlamb of Natural Links.

Starting from the quarry, we walked along the main footpath on the northern slope of Tennyson Down and there was a flock of at least 15 Long-tailed Tits making their way along the hedge. Other birds in this area included Blackbirds, Robins, Magpie, 2 Jays, 4 Chiffchaffs and a Great Spotted Woodpecker.

Long-tailed Tit

Great Spotted Woodpecker

As we reached the gorse covered ridge of the Down, a Green Woodpecker gave its presence away with its loud `yaffling' and a few Greenfinches flew over, accompanied by a Siskin calling. The open grasslands held at least 5 Meadow Pipits and 5 Skylarks, with one of the Skylarks still managing to remind of summer with its beautiful song as it flew overhead.

Meadow Pipit

Skylark

Speckled Wood

A couple of family groups of Stonechats were still on territory amongst the gorse bushes, seen along with Dunnocks, Wrens and Chaffinches. Jackdaws, Herring Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls patrolled the cliffs and both male and female Kestrels were hunting over West High Down. Both Red Admirals and Speckled Wood butterflies were still on the wing.

Dave Fairlamb

Sunday 19th November at Yarmouth

Eleven members met at Thorley Road for a walk along the cycle path to the scrape in front of Mill Copse led by Jackie Hart. A strong south-westerly wind, near gale force in gusts, kept any rain at bay but it also meant a lot of the birds were hunkered down out of view. 43 species were seen during the morning which was not bad considering the conditions. We stopped at Rofford Marsh, which had a higher water level than normal, with the highlight being a Marsh Harrier flying low over the marsh. Cetti's Warbler, one of three heard during the morning, was present further down the path. Moving on to the Western Yar estuary there was the usual overwintering wildfowl and waders present while among the flock of gulls at Yarmouth was at least one Mediterranean Gull. The species recorded during the morning were: Marsh Harrier, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Pheasant, Woodpigeon, Starling, Blackbird, Cetti's Warbler, Coot, Mallard, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Great Black Backed Gull, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Shoveler, Little Grebe, Carrion Crow, Moorhen, Jackdaw, Wigeon, Pintail, Canada Goose, Brent Goose, Shelduck, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Cormorant, Dunlin, Teal, Curlew, Wren, Robin, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Lapwing, Grey Plover, Greenshank, Meadow Pipit, House Sparrow, Reed Bunting and a male Stonechat.

Jim Baldwin

Sunday 17th December at Newtown National Nature Reserve

Nine members and two prospective new members met at the National Trust visitor centre car park for a walk in the area. We walked along High Street to the short footpath to the field overlooking Causeway Lake and noted the birds congregating there. There were Pintail, Wigeon, Lapwing, Oystercatcher and

Black-Tailed Godwit. On one of the fields opposite was a flock of Brent Geese feeding. Blue Tit were flitting in the hedgerow and a Buzzard flew overhead. We noted a total of three of the latter during the course of the morning. We heard a Raven calling and saw three Carrion Crow and a small flock of Fieldfares with three perched on the top of a tree on our continued walk to the flower meadow. This was very muddy and water had accumulated in the area of the gate which leads to Newtown River. Having successfully negotiated this we then walked around the saltpans to the boathouse and back along the wooden footbridge to the main hide looking at the birds on the way. There was a lovely spectacle of Dunlin twisting and turning in flight before landing on the Main Marsh. There were Cormorant, Redshank, Shelduck, Little Grebe, Red Breasted Merganser, Black Headed Gull, Herring Gull, Little Egret, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Curlew and in the Scrape, two Greenshank. On the Marsh near the boathouse were two Meadow Pipit. Two seals were resting on the mudflats. 35 species were noted during the morning.

Male Red-breasted Merganser Jim Baldwin

Dark-bellied Brent Goose Jim Baldwin

Jackie Hart

Botany

Tuesday 18th July Wydcombe Estate

Twelve enthusiastic members met at the Wydcombe Estate on a very pleasant summer afternoon to botanise and record the marsh area there. This area was the subject of a compete survey that was published in the 2000 Proceedings and a Botany visit in July 2016. We were very fortunate to have Anne Marston with us. She did much of the recording and was able to help us the some of the more critical plant genera we struggle with.

Before we walked up to the marsh area there were interesting plants to observe. Around the ponds Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) was putting up a nice display, as was Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*). We also could not help but notice a wonderful display of pink Roses growing over the walls.

Our walk to the marsh area took us up a shady lane where there were some nice stands of Soft Shield Fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) and Male Ferns (*Dryopteris filix-mas*). Once we got into the marsh a wide range of species could be observed. 61 species were recorded in total. Marsh Arrowgrass (*Trichlochlin palustre*) was observed. This is a local and declining plant of grazed marshy fields. A number of Rushes were seen, including the Sharp Flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) and the Hard Rush (*Juncus inflexus*). We were able to split open the stems of these various rushes to observe the arrangement of the pith inside; sometimes the pith is continuous, and in other cases it is partitioned. Another rush-like plant we observed was the Spike Rush (*Eleocharis palustre*). Two sedges were observed, Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*) and Smooth-stalked Sedge (*Carex laevigata*). We were too late to see Southern Marsh Orchids (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) in flower but did observe some plants in fruit.


The whole site presented a wonderful summer scene with many butterflies foraging on wild species. We saw many Marbled Whites (*Melanargia galathea*), and Gatekeepers (*Pyronia tithonus*).
Other invertebrates observed were several Great Green Bush Crickets (*Tetigonia viridissima)* and a Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*).

Colour was provided by various yellow Potentillas, the Trailing Cinquefoil (*P. anglica*), Silverweed (*P. anserina*) and Tormentil (*P. erecta*). Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*) was another marshland species we were pleased to see. Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*) was quite common, one of our more distinctive Thistles.

The group were keen to check out the Bierley Waterfall, so we ended the afternoon with a walk to it, passing a very nice stand of Sycamore trees (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) with their distinctive bark. Due to the recent heatwaves the waterfall was reduced to a trickle.

Dave and Hazel Trevan

Saturday 12th August 2023 Fort Victoria and Norton Spit.

Eleven members assembled for a botanising visit to Fort Victoria and Norton Spit. After an initial heavy rain shower the day turned out warm and pleasant. We started botanising on an area of waste ground at Fort Victoria, where over 50 species were recorded. This area was interesting and colourful with notable stands of rather dwarf Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), Perforate St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa)* and the colourful orange flowered Monbretia (*Crocosmia x crocosmiflora*), a garden escape sometimes found on waste ground. Stands of the Large Flowered Evening Primrose (*Oenothera glaziovianae*), another species of waste ground were observed, along with the interesting Yellow Wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) a member of the Gentian family. We were sad to learn that this area is likely to have houses built on it.

As we made our way to the sea wall, we saw our first truly coastal plants. The star plant was a magnificent group of Yellow Horned Poppies (*Glaucium flavum)* with its stunning yellow flowers and attractive hairy grey rosettes of foliage. Our plant still had flowers but but also many of the linear seed capsules. In the same area we started to see some Oraches, typical plants of shingle and dunes including Spear-leaved Orache (*Atriplex prostate*) and Common Orache (*Atriplex patula*).

Our walk took us along the shingly beach to a wooded area where there were large stands of Hemp Agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*). There were butterflies, notable Red Admirals feeding on them as well as many Hornet Mimic Hover Flies (*Volucella zonaria*). One notable plant in this area was Brookweed (*Samolus verlandi*). Colin Pope had pointed this species out to us on a previous visit and we were pleased to find it again. Nationally in decline, it is only found in a few sites on the Island. Its habitat is the upper parts of salt marshes and flushes on coastal cliffs.

Once we reached the Spit, we were able to record a whole variety of coastal plants. Many of these plants are known as psammophytes as they grow in sand and their roots help to bind the sand together. Rock

Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*) with its display of leathery succulent leaves and yellow flowers was very abundant, a most attractive coastal plant. The Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum)* was magnificent. Norton Spit is one of the best places to see them on the island and they did not disappoint. This wonderful glaucous perennial is a true xerophyte with a deep root system and waxy leaves, enabling it to survive in extreme conditions.

The group stopped for a picnic at the end of the Spit. We then continued to botanise along the beach, where we saw plants of Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali;* illustrated above), Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*), Sea Bindweeed (*Calystegia soldanella*) (but sadly not in flower.) In the coastal lagoons many species were observed including Glassworts *(Salicornia agg),* Sea Lavender *(Limonium vulgare)* and Cord Grass (*Spartina anglica*).

Dave and Hazel Trevan

Great Park Farm, near Newport 9th September 2023

A group of 14 assembled by Great Park Farmhouse, on one of the hottest September days on record. Vicky Basford gave us an overview of the history of the area which is mentioned in the Domesday book as part of the King's estate at Watchingwell. In medieval times, some of the land was a deer park, possibly used for the rearing of animals which were later released into Parkhurst Forest to be hunted. The land passed through various ownerships, including the Barrington and Simeon families and the old deer park was turned over to arable farming from the mid-nineteenth century.

Mark Larter explained that when the land changed hands in recent years, the new owner realised that the area was not yielding a profit under an intensive arable regime and approached Natural England about the possibility of reversion to grassland. The soils are heavy stony clay, and the fields lie wet in winter. A ten-year Environmental Scheme was entered into on the 1st January 2021.

To prevent soil loss by erosion, a cover mix was sown initially, and some planting, mostly of native broadleaved trees has occurred to begin the process of thickening up field boundaries. Stock grazing has been introduced, using a herd of shorthorn cattle ranging over the land. They are modifying the vegetation structure; their hooves poach the land and create open areas which will be colonised by windblown seed as well as allowing long-buried seed of arable flora to germinate. Over time, the floral composition will change and provide a variety of habitats which will in turn attract other wildlife.

The group walked through two of the areas of the former deer park to record the plants present and this information will add to the monitoring effort already underway. At various points along our walk, Mark explained the significance of the plants which were present and demonstrated the differences between areas, some which are developing a more diverse flora as the scheme proceeds.

Anne Marston

Fungi

We held a reduced programme of foray events this autumn but also had one or two impromptu events.

Sunday 1st October Beech Copse, Godshill

12 members took part in our first foray of the season. We found just 29 species but these included *Mycena acicula*, the Orange Bonnet, and *Pseudoboletus parasiticus* growing on earthballs.

Saturday 7th October Osborne Estate

15 members were joined by Eric Janke, leader of the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group and his wife, Sue. We spent the day on the Estate, courtesy of English Heritage and recorded 57 species. This was a rather poor tally but the season to date had been dry and foray groups around the country had been having poor forays. Nevertheless, we did better than we had feared. Good finds included *Gyroporus castaneus,* Chestnut Bolete; *Pluteus chrysophaeus,* Yellow Shield; and *Leccinum duriusculum,* Slate Bolete. *Amanita ceciliae*, Snakeskin Gristette, was the best find of the day, made by Lily Gray. The resupinate, *Botryobasidium laeve*, identified by Eric, was a first record for the Island.

Sunday 12th November Martin's Wood, Newchurch

This was perhaps our most successful foray of the season, although attended by just seven members. We found many delightful, photogenic fungi. *Leotia lubrica*, Jelly Baby (photo left); *Galerina hypnorum*, Moss Bell, amongst mosses and Dog's-tooth Lichen, *Peltigera*; *Stropharia cyanea,* Blue Roundhead; and many fungi associated with dead or dying wood.

Colin Pope

Left: Footprint of Iguanadon bernisartensis exposed by storms at Hanover Point Photo Will Hannan
Right: Our new relocated headquarters at Unit 7C, Prospect Business Centre.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S NOTES

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

Deaths

We regret to announce the following deaths:

SOCIETY OFFICERS:-

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

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NEXT BULLETIN

Please send any items for inclusion in the next Bulletin, and Reports of any Meetings for 1st January 2024 to 30th June 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 July 2024

Bulletin Editor: Colin Pope, colinrpope@gmail.com

Above: A roost of 9 Cattle Egrets, 3 Great Egrets and 1 Grey Heron on Brading Marshes RSPB reserve. Below left: Dark Green Fritillary, Nansen Hill; Below right: Ivy Bees at Wheeler's Bay; Bottom: Heron at Bonchurch pond.
Photos Andy Butler