### Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/01 - 1 January 2022 - Happy New Year!



Blackbird Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: The yew tree in the garden has been attracting a variety of birds, particularly Goldfinches, Goldcrests and Blackbirds. I am not sure whether this is an immature male or perhaps a European visitor?

#### **Happy New Year!**

Marion and Jim Perriss: What fascinating information about the Round-mouthed Snail (newsletter 201). We have never heard of it, let alone see one. We shall be on the lookout at any suitable habitat from now on.

Thank you so much for all the wonderful newsletters that you have sent over the past year. So much information and excellent photographs, from you and you contributors. It is a real pleasure to receive them.

We wish everyone in the Parish a Happy and Healthier New Year.

#### **Brown Trout**

*lain Freeman*: We have a little stretch of river here where the Brown Trout make their scrapes and spawn from the middle of November until mid to late December. Normally the scrapes appear overnight and get to a size of a hundred to two hundred square feet over a period of a week or so.

This year there were a couple of small specimens and a correspondingly small redd. It appeared in mid-November, but there was no further activity and I was concerned that perhaps the trout population had gone into a sudden decline.

However, about a week ago a modest redd appeared and I observed seven or eight smallish fish and one that was probably nearly two feet long. Not a great showing, but still reassuring to know that the cycle continues. I know that trout are very picky about the precise size of the gravel at the bottom of the river, and that is why this location is a favoured one for them.

Does anybody know of other redds along the Throop-Affpuddle stretch?

#### **Good News from Roger and Christine**

Roger Hewitt: One bit of good news over Christmas was that Christine's and my sighting of the White-tailed Eagle on 2nd May 2020 over our parish has now been accepted by the Dorset Bird Club\*. We had thought that the bird was from the Isle of Wight release project, but the satellite tracking data was checked and confirmed that it was not one of the released birds.

\*The previous sighting of a wild White-tailed Eagle in Dorset had been in 1941.

So now it can be put on our parish bird list.



White-tailed Eagle Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: This photo was taken in Scotland and is of an immature bird and is what people are likely to see just now in Dorset. It matches the bird that we saw over our house by Christine and me over Oakers Wood. It takes four to five years to become an adult.

A small influx of continental White-tailed Eagles had been noted at a few sites across England in 2020 and as a growing population has established in the Netherlands and Northern France in recent years it is thought to have come from one of these, so we could see a few more in the future.

I managed one walk over the Christmas period and I'm glad to say the Egyptian Geese are back. Let's hope they stay and have another go at breeding.

It was also good to see a Water Rail at Throop.

#### **Feedback and Observations**

*Iain Freeman*: Following up from the beautiful images of a Redwing and a Fieldfare (newsletters 199 and 200): We have had fewer berries on the holly this year and have as a result seen fewer Redwings and Fieldfares in the garden.

Also the Blackbirds seem to have had to resort to a different food source: apples. I usually take what we want and eventually cart the damaged ones to the bottom of the garden to rot down, but this year, due to laziness, I left a few under the tree for longer than usual. They stayed there in a small heap for several weeks, ignored except by a couple of snacking Crows and then suddenly the Blackbirds (a dozen of them and one Redwing) discovered them.

For some reason the apple dump at the bottom of the garden was relatively untouched so I have taken to bringing up the odd basketfull to put under the apple tree. They normally disappear without trace within two days.

#### **Looking Forward**

Adrian Middleton: Peering of late through various windows onto a rain-swept garden and fields has provided a limited assessment of local wildlife activities. There has been a solitary male Bullfinch on the roses, a couple of Pied Wagtails and a Greenfinch feeding on the lawn, Siskins and Great Spotted Woodpecker on peanuts, Goldfinches on the niger seed and a female Sparrowhawk and Buzzard coursing by. The ploughed south field, reseeded and now just

beginning to green over, has been frequented by up to a dozen or so lapwings and anywhere between two and three hundred corvids (sometimes an imposing flock of black at dawn and dusk) —nearly all Rooks, also shared with Woodpigeons and Black-headed Gulls. A pair of Mute Swans (reminding me of the unfortunate demise of one such bird spotted by Pam Boyt and ably rescued by the RSPCA) and a small number of Little Egrets have frequented the water meadows Nick Gore tells me Barn Owls have been heard screeching nearby too.

Clearing the last fallen leaves of autumn from the pond uncovered an adult palmate newt. But perhaps more importantly have been my recent communications with Ben and Eli two keen young herpetologists. Their memories are more of pythons, corn snakes and other exotic snakes but I share with them their aspirations for sightings of our native reptiles and other wildlife in the coming months of the New Year.



The Piddle on a mild damp New Year's Day looking westwards from
Briantspuddle Bridge Photo by Margaret Cheetham



The Piddle on a mild damp New Year's Day looking eastwards from Briantspuddle Bridge Photo by Margaret Cheetham

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter 2022/02 12 January 2022 Has the Climate gone Mad? Mistle Thrush, Thomas Hardy, Fungus ID



Gorse Shieldbug – the first this year were six weeks ahead of schedule

Photo by Ian Cross

#### Has the climate gone mad?

*Ian Cross*: So far this has been an extraordinarily mild winter, and a few phenomena that I might expect a little later in the year have already made their presence felt.

I usually expect to see the occasional early Palmate Newt lurking in the shallows in preparation for the coming breeding season around this time of year. Recently, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January I found males, not only back in their ponds

but already nearly in full breeding dress - complete with wide, black sycamore-leaf-shaped hind feet. They were already up for a game of gentle pursuit of other newts, even though these inevitably turned out to be other males. What really surprised me was that I could see them, not just in ones and twos, but by the dozen!

Elsewhere, a sheltered spot that often produces early Hazel catkins already had bushes clad in fully expanded male catkins on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January. In among them, the first tiny, red, 'spidery' female flowers were also out. Today, the 12<sup>th</sup> of January, came my biggest surprise. I found adult Gorse Shieldbugs (*Piezodorus lituratus*) temporarily breaking their hibernation to bask in the sun. These are often the first shieldbugs to appear each year but these are the earliest I have seen in the parish by a full six weeks! What amazed me even more was that this also wasn't an isolated individual. In fact I found them at three separate sites across the parish from Black Hill to Pallington Clump.

The picture is of an individual just prior to hibernation in October (I didn't have my camera on the January occasion). You'll notice that the gorse is in full flower. Co-incidentally this was also the case on the 12<sup>th</sup> January, when most of the bushes had some flowers. This was <u>not</u> particularly unusual – though it peaks around April, Common Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) can be found in flower on virtually every day of the year.

lain Freeman: Following on from my previous notes regarding trout spawning in the Piddle, I had a look at the river about a week before Christmas and was pleased to see that a new, much larger redd had appeared and was being used by about a dozen fish, most of them around 40 to 60cm in length. The appearance of these fish has been a little later than in most years, but in size and number this seems as good as any year I have seen.

PS: That snail in the Boxing Day edition was extraordinary: I didn't even know they existed.

#### Mistle Thrush



Mistle Thrush on Affpuddle garden yew berries Photo by Helen Frost

#### **A Darkling Thrush**

*Philip Martin*: It is not unusual, I understand, to hear the mistle thrush singing in the winter months, but I was particularly pleased to hear that unmistakeable call in the Affpuddle meadows at around midday on December 31st. The bird was somewhere in the tree canopy over the river, singing intermittently for five minutes or more. Whenever I hear the mistle thrush, it always seems to

me that there is going to be a second phrase to the song, but of course there never is: the first phrase is simply repeated, with only (to my untutored ear) slight and stuttering modifications.

To hear a mistle thrush in Dorset on December 31st, the last day of the passing year, immediately evokes Thomas Hardy's great poem 'The Darkling Thrush', a work commonly understood to express the disillusion of the closing decade of the nineteenth century. The significance of his poem – dated 31st December 1900 - is not only that the bird's song marks the passing of the year, but that it also marks the end of the nineteenth century (or possibly, the passing of the first year of a new century depending on how you want to count).

Most of Hardy's commentators and critics sensibly read the poem as an 'end of century' commemoration, understanding that the last day of the nineteenth century is in fact 31st December 1900, giving a full hundred years to the century, since AD dating did not start with a year zero. The poem presents the mid-winter landscape in morbid terms:

The land's sharp features seemed to be The century's corpse outleant His crypt the cloudy canopy, The wind his death-lament The ancient pulse of germ and birth Was shrunken hard and dry ....

Pretty grim stuff, but perhaps to be expected for we don't usually go to Hardy to be cheered up. However, the whole point here is that this deathly scene is to be redeemed by the bird's song — significantly described as a 'full-hearted evensong' (and there's a lot of meaning tucked into that tiny phrase). For Hardy, there is no justification for such joy in the gloomy landscape he surveys, but he concludes the poem optimistically:

... I could think there trembled through His happy good-night air Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew And I was unaware. After 2021, and all that it has brought, I'm quite happy to go along with that too. But there's another point to this poem, easily overlooked by those preoccupied with the grand scale and historical symbolism of Hardy's poem. Hardy was a countryman, and what he knew, only too well, was that the natural year had turned, and that the mistle – quite simply - is to be understood as one of Spring's early harbingers.

#### Number 514

Margaret Cheetham: We recently had to add up how many newsletters have been published since we began in 2004. If I have added up correctly (and there is no guarantee of that!) then this edition is number 514.

Thank you to everyone!

**ID Question**Photos sent in by Julian Francis





*Ian Cross*: Probably False Turkey-tail (*Stereum hirsutum*). Needs a close view of the pore-bearing surface to be sure. False Turkey-tail is common in the parish.



Photo sent in by Julian Francis

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/03 (515) 16 January 2022

Male Bank Vole, Garden Birds through the window, Special Feature: A bug with shoulder pads



Male Bank Vole

Photo by Adrian Middleton

Mystery photo By Ian Cross

See page 4 to find out what it is...



#### Looking through the window

Adrian Middleton: Once again looking through the window on an overcast foggy morning provided the opportunity to photograph three of our pigeon species together i.e. the Woodpigeon, the Collared Dove and a multi-ringed racing pigeon representing the Rock Dove.

This is the only occasion I have seen these three species in the garden together. Ubiquitous feral pigeons and those selected by pigeon fanciers (including this wayward racer) are all taken to be derivatives of the original Rock Dove and are regarded as the same species.

Two other pigeon species come to mind – the now scarce Turtle Dove, a summer visitor and the often overlooked Stock Dove. It would be nice to see photos of the two last-mentioned species to complete the picture. All these species have their own attractive physical features, characteristic call notes and special behavioural patterns.



Pigeons on the lawn Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### Wrens through the Window

Helen Frost: I'm desperate for some brighter weather as this grey is very depressing! In the meantime, I amused myself yesterday taking photos of the garden birds that I could see from the kitchen window. Maybe other readers would like to have a go as if you set aside some time to watch, you never know who might come along! We will be doing this for the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch in a couple of weeks but no bad thing to get your eye in before that. Here is a little wren foraging on the rockery



Wrens from the window Photos by Helen Frost



#### **Bronze Shieldbug**

*Ian Cross*: When I first learnt to identify shieldbugs – many years ago – this species was simply known by its scientific name *Troilus luridus*. The name 'Bronze Shieldbug' is a recent innovation, and I must say I heartily approve. With its dull brown colour, glossy metallic highlights and dimpled shell it does look for all the world like a weathered bronze artefact, recently unearthed from an archaeological dig.

Bronze Shieldbug making an early appearance from hibernation Photo by Ian Cross



The Bronze Shieldbug is widespread in the parish, though never numerous. I tend to find it in light, open woodland of various types but, apart from that, I really have no 'helpful hints' for searching them out. I never seem to do anything other than just 'come across' them from time to time.

Like many shieldbugs they can be found as adults at virtually any time of year. This one was one of a remarkable series of early shieldbug finds this winter. A premature, and probably only transient, emergence from hibernation, it sat basking on a log in a sun patch deep in a birch wood on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January.

Despite the fact that it has that 'dull brown with no distinguishing features' feel about it, the Bronze Shieldbug is fairly straightforward to identify. With its overall brownish colour and big, projecting, squared-off 'shoulder pads' (straight out of an eighties fashion magazine) it most of all resembles the common Red-legged Shieldbug (*Pentatoma rufipes*).

The Bronze Shieldbug lacks the dull reddish-orange legs of its commoner relative but, instead, has conspicuous orange bands around its penultimate antennal segments.

Most shieldbugs are harmless feeders on plant sap. An interesting feature of this species is that it is mainly predatory, with a fondness for draining caterpillars of their bodily fluids like a low-budget vampire. It shares this distinctly antisocial habit with three other UK shieldbugs which are given the distinction of their own little subfamily – the Asopinae.

Two other members of this group: the Spiked Shieldbug (*Picromerus bidens*) and the lovely Blue Shieldbug (*Zicrona caerulea*) are also found in the parish.

Anne Colquhoun: I much enjoy the newsletters and was particularly interested to read the one from British Columbia as I spent a very happy summer (years ago) working on a cattle ranch in the Fraser Valley at a place called Alkali Lake.



"Pheasant at the High Table" Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### Big Garden Birdwatch – get ready!

Be wowed by your local wildlife. Big Garden Birdwatch is for everyone, whether you're a complete beginner or a birding expert. Simply count the birds you see in your garden, from your balcony or in your local park for one hour between 28 and 30 January 2022.

https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-

PBhCNARIsABcz770RBeq6boYfHWWJNsucC3KsItoZv3X8mKeZ45jYy9cim0B5LbZrt waAg QEALw wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds

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Briantspuddle Community Website and we'll sort out a Plan B.

## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/04 30 January 2022 Sika at Oakers Wood, Wildlife through the Window



Sika at Oakers Wood Photo by Helen Frost



Sika at Oakers Wood Photo by Helen Frost



Deer hair Photo by Helen Frost

#### Further reflections on wildlife through the window

Adrian Middleton: As usual, wintry weather has compelled me to provide extra feed for birds in the garden and to attract them during the end of January RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch count.

Nothing has changed much of late. A female Sparrow Hawk is still frequenting the garden. The buzzard, taken to be an immature one, has been slightly less timid and has been seen perched on a back fence post and in a hedgerow hawthorn, as well as regularly in the south field. Little Egret, Mute Swans, a Cormorant and a pair of Herring Gulls are evident in the water meadows.

For the RSPB bird watch in the garden I saw 17 species essentially all the expected common species including 2 pied wagtails: absentees included regulars such as Great Spotted Woodpecker and several others just flying overhead and not alighting.

However it has been a very small mammal that remains the focus of my attention. Grain put out on the terrace wall near where it has been hiding amongst the adjoining vegetation continues to be a joint attraction. This Bank Vole has proved to be a wee sleekit cowrin tim'rous beastie, a bit like the mouse in the poem by Robert Burns, the poet who is celebrated particularly at this time of year.



Bank Vole Photo by Adrian Middleton



Bank Vole Photo by Adrian Middleton

The vole only appears sporadically and only when all is quiet and the garden birds such as the Robin, shown below, have all flown away, however briefly. This animal's arrival is announced by a quivering leaf and then it appears as a barely visible small brown restless form (smaller than that of any of the birds) in the base of one or other plant growing there.

Although previously featured in a recent parish wildlife newsletter (2022/3) I have felt compelled to show a couple of the new hard-come-by photos of this animal firstly sheltering under a geranium and secondly briefly venturing out of cover.

No doubt this subject of my special interest will eventually disappear as unexpectedly as when it first appeared, but I hope not.



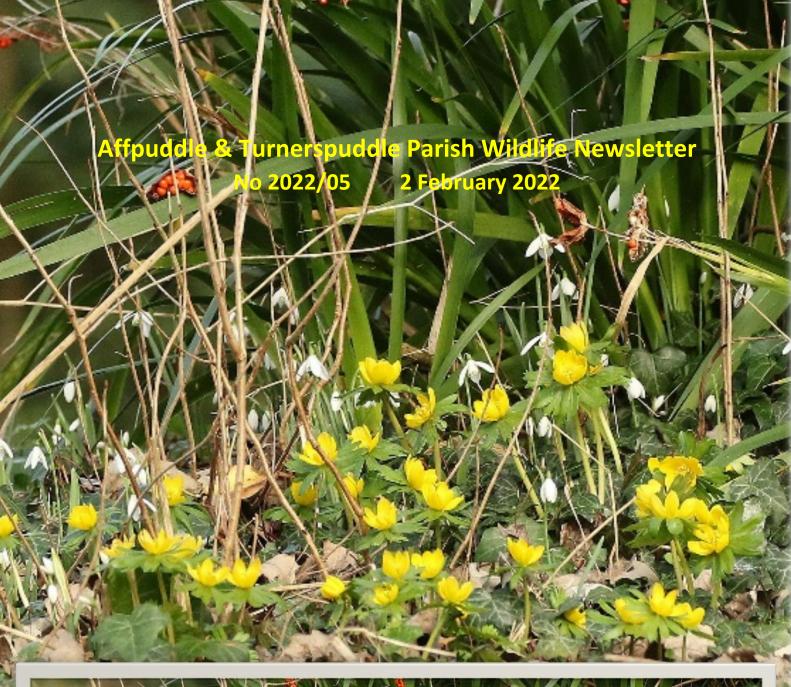
Robin in the garden Photo by Adrian Middleton



Female Bullfinch at Turnerspuddle

Photo by Helen Frost

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Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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Roger Hewitt: The Winter Aconites and Snowdrops are out now in Turnerspuddle Churchyard.

Photo by Roger Hewitt

#### First Woodlark of the year

Ian Cross: Bird sound begins early in preparation for the new breeding season: I often hear the first drumming of Great Spotted Woodpecker or the melodious, far-reaching notes of a Mistle Thrush, even before Christmas. Once you are past the solstice the chorus builds and swells. The cheerful tinkle of a Dunnock soon appears and the ringing "teacher, teacher" of a Great Tit is never far behind.

By January the woods and hedges already have a rich background of bird song. On a walk you may even be jolted out of your reverie by the staccato burst of the local Cetti's Warbler or hear the first, muted calling of a Dartford Warbler (though no song yet) before the month is out.

It's not the full orchestra by a long way, but all of this is a pleasant overture for the spring to come. Yet, for me, one bird song is special. It's an announcement that, although spring is not quite here, it is just around the corner.

This welcome milestone is my first Woodlark song. I usually expect it sometime around the first half of February. This year was my earliest ever – on the  $2^{nd}$  of the month. My first last year was on the  $6^{th}$  of February, in 2020 it was on the  $7^{th}$  of the month and in 2018 – a slightly tardy year – it was on the  $16^{th}$ .

The Woodlark has an unusual approach to population movements. Some of our breeding birds spend the winter on the continent, whist others tend to stick closer to home. Generally, as a rough rule, the further west you go, the more sedentary the birds become. In East Anglia the territories are empty in the winter, the birds having all moved away. In central southern England some birds remain close to their breeding areas while others move further afield.

The result of this is that when you hear birds outside the normal breeding season it's possible that they are not locals but have come from a bit further afield. I spent a wonderful morning last October listening to two Woodlarks singing on a still, sunny morning on the Erica trust reserve. Whether these were birds that had held territories in the same place earlier in the spring, or complete strangers is open to debate.

#### The RSPB Garden Bird Watch

Helen Frost: Others who took part might like to compare - we saw 17 species during the hour - most numerous was the house sparrow and most interesting (to us) was the pair of siskin.

Photos show the female with niger seed and male in the tree.
We also had a female
Great Spotted Woodpecker.





#### **Bat Willow Lane in Throop**



Water Rail at Bat Willow Lane Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: This Water Rail was really hard to photograph what with poor light and despite me telling it to stay still it would still keep running away. It was at the northern end of Bat Willow Lane, Throop.

Margaret Cheetham: If you're wondering where Bat Willow Lane is, it's the lane going from Throop to Gully Lane. See if you can spot the sign on a wall on the left as you approach the bridge over the Piddle. (Photo by Margaret Cheetham).



#### Frogspawn arrives!

In Tasie's garden in Briantspuddle, on the north side of the road, but south-facing. We (Margaret and Ian) are on the south side of the road, but the garden slopes northwards. Our frogspawn is usually some days or even weeks later.

#### Roger Hewitt's January bird report

Roger Hewitt: I cannot believe a month has passed already. It has been a dreary month with dark skies no good for decent photography, but most of our regular birds have been seen.

Roger Hewitt: The only shot I got of the Brambling - always perched high up



I will list the more unusual ones:

- One Cattle Egret in the Waddock Cross area
- 100 Lapwings at Affpuddle
- A flock of Golden Plover flew over the field swooping up and down while I
  was watching a Brambling in the winter feeding crop in Roger Prideaux's

field at Affpuddle. They only landed very briefly before heading back over Tolpuddle, probably from the wintering flock at Maiden Castle.

- Linnets and Chaffinch in Roger Prideaux's winter crop field in Affpuddle.
- Eight Egyptian Geese and six Mandarin Ducks with some Teal at the fishing lake in Briantspuddle.
- A Firecrest while I was walking up the Hollow.
- A flock of around 20 Reed Buntings on Erica Trust land. It was nice to see them feeding on the grass seed heads.

#### Also seen at various places:

4 Dartford Warblers, Snipe, Woodcock, Green Sandpiper. Four Crossbills, Peregrine Falcon, Cettis Warbler, two pairs of Marsh Tits and last, but not least, the Barn Owls at both ends of the parish.

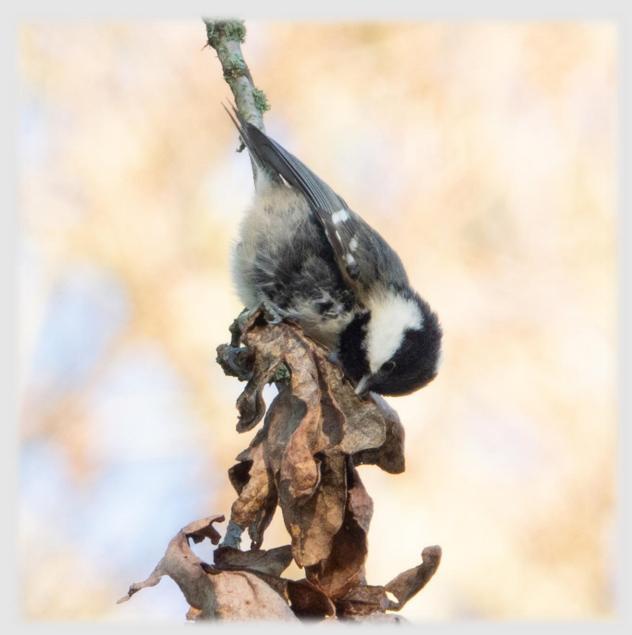
So in all a total of 79 species. A few missing but hopefully we will get them in February.

#### What do Coal Tits eat?

Helen Frost: Insects, spiders, seeds and nuts - here are a couple foraging on my walk around Moreton.



Cole Tit Photo by Helen Frost



Coal Tit Photo by Helen Frost

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/06 4 February 2022 Frogspawn, Mustelidae, Parish Birds



Frogspawn in the garden pond Photo by Tasie Russell

Margaret Cheetham: one of our ponds at 16 Briantspuddle (the other side of the road from Tasie) now has frogspawn.

#### Mustelidae in the parish

*Ian Cross*: Six species of the mammal family Mustelidae occur in our parish: Badger, Otter, American Mink, Polecat, Stoat and Weasel. This group of charismatic carnivores was brought to mind to me recently by two things: credible recent sightings of Polecat in our neighbouring parish of Bere Regis and an item on skulls in the BBC's 'Winterwatch' broadcast in the past week.

As a zoologist, I find few things as fascinating as skulls, so the combination of these two events was irresistible. It set me to thinking: if you look at the list above, the Mustelidae sound like a pretty diverse group. Yet, when you compare their internal anatomy the similarities soon become apparent.



Above: Mustelid skulls differ in size but share the same overall elongate shape. From top left to bottom right: Beech Marten, Polecat Ferret, Stoat and Weasel.

Photo by Ian Cross

Nothing exemplifies this more than the mustelid skull. They all share a common set of features: the pointed canines of a predator combined with the

slim, elongate shape needed by an animal that spends a lot of time chasing prey in confined spaces, often in tunnels.

To illustrate the variation in size – yet all based on the same general ground plan – I have assembled four skulls representing three species that live in our parish – and one that doesn't. For a mustelid that **doesn't** live locally, I wanted to show a Pine Marten. However, that's one skull I don't have, so I have cheated a bit and substituted the skull of a Beech Marten. This is a close relative of the Pine Marten that lives on the continent. In internal anatomy it is pretty much identical.



From above the size difference is even more apparent. This time from left to right: Weasel, Stoat, Polecat Ferret and Beech Marten. Photo by Ian Cross.

Regarding polecats, there's a lot of dispute over the extent to which individuals are 'pure bred' Polecats or hybrid descendants of Ferrets, often referred to as 'polecat ferrets'. The differences are subtle but I am confident that the skull shown belongs to a Polecat Ferret.

Stoat and Weasel skulls are very similar and most of the differences come down to size. I have always found the old saying, that a Weasel skull will pass through a wedding ring, to be pretty dependable. It was satisfying to see this demonstrated so literally by Chris Packham on Winterwatch.

**Egyptian Geese**Photo by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: I was watching the fishing lake late one evening and I could count five Egyptian Geese. I thought that was a good sign and that the numbers were going up. That will give us a better chance of a pair breeding. All of a sudden they took off, and when they were clear of the trees I could see that there were eight of them – that's the most that I have seen here. I still think that they come in from Silverlake and that they may go back there to roost, but I may be wrong.

*Ian Cross*: I visited the Erica Trust land this afternoon (3rd February). There were two male Woodlark in full song: 'duelling' with each other from the treetops just to the north-west of Culpepper's Dish. Absolutely wonderful.

Helen Frost: I was pleased to see and hear the song thrush in its normal place just by the car park entrance at Oakers Wood. I stood and listened to the lovely song for a few minutes and really felt uplifted.

Song Thrush at Oakers Wood car park Photos by Helen Frost.



### Cormorant, Buzzard and Jackdaws sharing a space

Helen Frost: When we moved to
Affpuddle from a village near
Chichester Harbour, I was used to
seeing cormorant on the sea but I
did not anticipate seeing one in the tree
opposite our house here! Here it is
together with buzzard and jackdaws
sharing the space!



Buzzard (above) Photo by Helen Frost



Photos by Helen Frost (Cormorant – top right. Buzzard – bottom left)



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## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/07 7 February 2022



Frogs at Moreton Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: I wondered what was on the path in front of us at first - looked like some mossy bark - seemed quite oblivious to us and the dog!

Margaret Cheetham: That's a very pregnant female! It's unusual to see frogs in the road like this, although toads in amplexus (mating position) can commonly be seen in Briantspuddle trying to cross the road to the lake. In fact, driving through Briantspuddle on a mild wet night at this time can be a nightmare (for them and for us as we try to avoid driving over them)

Woodlark
on Erica Trust Land (5<sup>th</sup> February 2022). Photo by Roger Hewitt

#### **Barren Strawberry**

*Ian Cross*: Lesser Celandine, Primrose and Snowdrop are all flowering strongly now and bringing a welcome splash of colour to the February woods. However, these three already have their loyal fan base and need no promotion from me. This is an opportunity to highlight another spring flower. One that raises its head above the parapet - even as early as the first week of February - in our hedge banks, copses and woodland rides.

On a sunny, south-facing, woodland bank, you may have noticed an insignificant, tiny white flower, barely raised above ground level and snuggled tightly among the low carpet of leaves. The flower and leaves may remind you of something more familiar. Yes, there's definitely something strawberry-like about them.



Barren Strawberry: hugging the ground on sunny banks in the spring woodlands. Photo by Ian Cross.

This is the Barren Strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*) and, if you thought it reminded you of the familiar Wild Strawberry, you wouldn't be so very far off. It's actually a close relative of the true strawberries, but differs in one very important respect.

The clue's in the name: both the common name and it's scientific name. It's not totally 'barren' of course but it doesn't bear strawberries or anything like them, just insignificant, green seed-heads.

That would be the best way of distinguishing Barren Strawberry and Wild Strawberry if it wasn't for one little problem. If you've only got the flowers in front of you, how would you know? Features to look out for on the Barren

Strawberry include: the hairy underside of the leaves and the notched tip of the delicate white petals.

Another reliable character is the little tooth at the end of the mid-rib of the leaf lobes. This is noticeably shorter and smaller than the teeth that flank it on either side. Have a close look at the large leaf in the centre of the picture. Perhaps an easier distinguishing feature is the flowering time. Barren Strawberries are out now, whilst the Wild Strawberry won't start flowering until about April.



Marsh Tit
Photo by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: On Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> February I walked to Oakers Wood. Nuthatches were getting very vocal as well as some of the other woodland species, but for some reason I love seeing the Marsh Tits. Numbers have dropped off quite a lot in recent years. Oakers Wood has always had a few pairs and still does, but I have seen a pair by the main river bridge at Briantspuddle for a couple of years now. Recently they were looking for a nest site here. I also saw one a while ago at Kite Hill and a pair near Throop about a week ago. So I am hopeful things might be looking up for these delightful little birds. Now is the time to spot them, as when they start nesting end of April into May they become, like most birds, very secretive.

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
Please send your contributions to <a href="mailto:macheetham@hotmail.co.uk">macheetham@hotmail.co.uk</a>.
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/08 10 February 2022



Bumblebee on Crocus Photo by Chrissie Garside

*Chrissie Garside*: A little weighty? I was amused by this bee's choice of flower! Spring is sprung!

*Ian Cross*: Bumblebees will use a wide range of flowers, especially when they emerge from hibernation.

Pussy Willow Photo by Helen Frost







Life (and death?!) on **Erica Trust land**:

bird feathers, a bracket fungus (above), Gorse (below) Photos by Damien G Lewis



#### What's this on Turnerspuddle Heath?!

Submitted by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: while we were working on Turnerspuddle Heath on 4<sup>th</sup> February, one of the council workers spotted this egg case. He thought it was a Wasp Spider. It's not something you spot all the time. I know Wasp Spiders are fairly common, but could lan give us his thoughts?

*lan Cross*: Yes, this is a Wasp Spider cocoon. The cocoons are very intricately fashioned with layers of different types of silk. There is a parchment-like, protective outer cover and inner, more 'woolly' layers. Some arachnologists even go as far as suggesting that the latter might have an insulating function.

The cocoons are durable enough to last the winter — until the spiderlings emerge in the spring — so are often still present long after the spiders that made them have disappeared. They can be very easy to find. I counted 22 cocoons along a 50 metre stretch of a track on Bryants Puddle Heath. This was far more than the maximum number of spiders I found.

Here are some excerpts from newsletter 171/2021 (last September):

### Wasp Spider – a grasshopper's nightmare!

Unless you are a serious arachnophobe, we are fortunate in the parish to have a good population of Wasp Spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*). On grassy heathland tracks there are some fine colonies in our area and, in places, it's possible to see a dozen of the magnificent, black, yellow and white-banded females within the space of 20 metres or less.



Picture 3: Male and female Wasp spider - the female is the larger. The white zig-zag web just to her left is the stabilimentum. Photo by Ian Cross.



Picture 4: The Wasp Spider's elaborate cocoon looks more like a diving bell
Photo by Ian Cross

#### Looking out of the Window –an unexpected visitor

Adrian Middleton: In early February there has been an increase in the numbers of chaffinches feeding on the lawn but for just a few minutes one early blustery afternoon these have been joined by a strikingly marked and colourful winter visitor —a Brambling.

I managed long distance photo of this long distance traveller from northern Europe but whilst the Chaffinches lingered the Brambling stayed for just a few minutes and has not been seen again – so far.



Brambling Photo by Adrian Middleton

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor

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### Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/09 17 February 2022



Snowdrops at Turnerspuddle Church Photo by Helen Frost

#### The Cluster Fly

*Ian Cross:* They don't bite, they don't sting and they don't carry disease. Yet the Cluster Fly (*Pollenia rudis*) is probably responsible for more desperate calls to pest control firms than any of the other 7,000 species of British flies.

The baby flies live in the soil as parasites of earthworms. Upon emerging, the adult flies seek a safe, dry place to hibernate. In nature this would once have meant a large hollow tree. When the time comes to hibernate the flies alight on any vertical surface, then crawl upwards until they encounter a crevice or hole to explore. The outside wall of a house, especially in a rural area, will serve as a landing zone. Then, up they go until they come into contact with the eaves. There's usually a gap somewhere big enough to permit a fly to enter the loft and, Bob's your Uncle, they've got a place to hibernate.

The problem is that the flies do this in huge numbers. Furthermore, if the loft suits them, they leave traces of pheromones in the roof space, so that next year yet more flies and all their descendants know where to come. Over the years the numbers just build and build until they can be in the tens of thousands. The flies mass together for safety in heaving swarms, hence the name 'Cluster Flies'.

Perhaps this wouldn't matter too much if it wasn't for one little issue. Winter arrives, and the central heating goes on. The flies awake prematurely and start to wander in search of the way out. At this stage a wrong turn can take them into the living areas of the house.



The Cluster Fly. How can something so harmless be such a thorough nuisance?

Photo by Ian Cross

Cluster flies are about the same size as the common housefly. They differ in having a distinctive, 'chequered' abdomen and, on the thorax, a cosy 'fleece' of

straggly, golden-brown hairs. Compared with houseflies they are sluggish in flight and tend to blunder around, congregating in lethargic masses on windowsills or colliding with any light source.

In our house they make their presence known just as you are settling down to read a book in bed at night. One fly after another lumbers round your head before crashing into the bedside lamp. As fast as you remove one intruder, another appears.

I imagine that every property in the parish has at least some Cluster Flies but it would be interesting to know if any houses are beset by particularly large congregations of this unwelcome visitor.

#### **Red Admirals**

Red Admiral on Snowdrops Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: How often do you see Red Admirals trying to get nectar from Snowdrops? This one I spotted in Affpuddle Churchyard on the 9th February. There seems to be a lot around this year. I looked on the Dorset Butterfly Conservation website and there were quite a few sightings all over Dorset. Is this a sign of what's to come in the future? It would make interesting reading to know how many are all over the south of England.

Margaret Cheetham: They have been spotted in the parish in December and January too, on mild sunny days. Websites refer to winter sightings as potential migrants, but increasingly, it seems, those we see in winter are ones from the UK that are hibernating, waking up when the weather is warm (as it was on 9<sup>th</sup> February), then going back to sleep again when it gets cold! Good idea.



#### Bramblings in the garden

Helen Frost: I am pleased to say that the bramblings were back early this morning, in with the chaffinches at the back of the garden. Not very near and not much light but the best I can get today. At least three now, male and female. Interestingly, the male seems to have a blacker head than my books seem to suggest for this time of year but Ian will know better!

*Ian Cross*: This mottled, dusty black head seems about right for a winter male Brambling (left of centre, lower picture). In summer his head becomes a really crisp, solid, glossy black – really lovely, it's a pity we never see them like that!



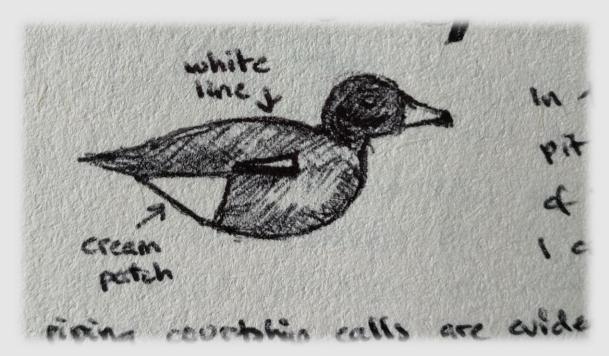
Left: Bramblings
Below: Chaffinch (at top)
with one male and two
female Bramblings
Photos by Helen Frost



#### Teal in the parish

*Ian Cross*: For a week or so now, a small flock of half-a-dozen Teal have been active at a site in the east of the parish. I've particularly enjoyed hearing the characteristic gentle piping mating calls of the males. Are they breeding here? Probably not, but it's good to have somewhere local to observe this delightful little duck displaying courtship behaviour.

The male Teal has a stripe of iridescent blue-green running across his head from the eye. In time the name of the duck came to be applied to this very particular shade of bluish-green.



Quick sketch of a male Teal an excerpt from Ian Cross' field notebook

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Newts spotted here! Erica Trust land on 17 Feb 2022. Photo by Margaret Cheetham



### Butterfly Report for Erica Trust Heath By Ian Cross

#### Introduction

Lee Woods and Smokeham Bottom (unofficially known as Erica Trust Heath) is an area of recently-restored heathland and mixed woodland that lies to the south-west of the village of Briantspuddle, Dorset. Until the winter of 2018/19, much of the area was covered by a plantation of mature conifers. Woodland and heathland management was undertaken in three phases during the winters of 2018/19 to 2020/21.

The bulk of the conifers having been cleared, conservation grazing with cattle has since been re-instated.

To date there has been no systematic survey of the butterflies on site. The following is the result of occasional sightings over a number of years. Records from visits prior to clearance were often made on the verges of the minor road that runs east to west and forms the southern boundary of the site. These records are included, as the verge provided a refuge for many species of butterfly during the years when the area was more densely stocked with conifers. As such it provided a nucleus for colonisation of the whole site – a process that is still underway.

Unfortunately, older records rarely stated whether butterflies were found on the northern or southern verges of the road – strictly only the northern side forms part of the reserve. However, since butterflies present on one verge would be sure to be found on the opposite roadside, these records have been regarded as belonging to the reserve.

Lee Woods and Smokeham Bottom lies within two of the one-kilometre squares of the national grid – namely SY8092 and SY8192. They each encompass roughly half of the reserve area and, since many sightings were often recorded by kilometre square, the presence of species in either square is noted below.

The nomenclature and arrangement of species follows the account in Fox, Warren and Brereton 2010.

#### **Species Accounts**

#### **1 Small Skipper** *Thymelicus sylvestris*

A common and widespread grassland species found in both SY8092 and SY8192, with records spanning 1998 to 2021. The Small Skipper is very adaptable and can be found on a variety of grassland sites, wherever its favourite foodplant, the grass *Holcus lanatus*, grows. It is almost certainly breeding on site, though there is no direct evidence.

#### **2** Large Skipper Ochlodes sylvanus

A common and widespread grassland species found in both SY8092 and SY8192, with records spanning 1998 to 2021. Likely to be breeding on site, though with no direct evidence. The most likely caterpillar foodplant on acid soils is *Molinia caerulea* which is well represented, or even locally dominant, across the whole site.

#### **3 Clouded Yellow** *Colias croceus*

An infrequent migrant species usually recorded as singletons away from the most favoured sites. Recorded in both SY8092 and SY8192 in 2020 and 2021. Highly unlikely to breed here as it requires a rich and consistent supply of herbaceous Fabaceae.

#### **4 Brimstone** *Gonepteryx rhamni*

A common, though rarely numerous, mobile species found in both SY8092 and SY8192, with records spanning 1982 to 2021. Neither of its larval foodplants, the shrubs *Rhamnus cathartica* and *Frangula alnus*, have been recorded on site, so it is only ever likely to be passing through.

#### 5 Small White Pieris rapae

A common and widespread species found in SY8092 in 2021. A very mobile species potentially found anywhere on the reserve. It is more often associated with cultivated Brassicaceae, so probably not breeding on site.

#### **Green-veined White** *Pieris napi*

A common and widespread species found in SY8092 and SY 8192 in 2021. A very mobile species potentially found anywhere on the reserve. It usually lays eggs on a wide range of wild Brassicaceae, so is potentially breeding on site, though with no definite evidence as yet.

#### **7 Orange Tip** *Anthocharis cardamines*

A frequent spring species with records so far from SY8192 between 2008 and 2021. This is one of very few species proven to breed on site, with eggs, larvae and even pupae found on *Alliaria petiolata* on lusher road verges in the eastern part of the reserve.

### 8 Green Hairstreak Callophrys rubi

Another species confirmed as breeding on site, with larvae found on *Ulex europaeus* in SY8192. So far only recorded in that square in 2020 and 2021. Likely to be found more widely, wherever gorse grows in sunny, sheltered situations.

#### **9 Purple Hairstreak** *Neozephyrus quercus*

Adults have been observed in SY8192, from Culpepper's Dish all the way down into 'The Hollow' on the very fringes of Briantspuddle, with the most recent record in August of 2021. These are likely to represent one large colony associated with the fine, towering specimens of *Quercus robur* in this area. Almost certainly breeding here, though with no direct evidence.

#### **10 Small Copper** *Lycaena phlaeas*

Very locally frequent in the parish in hot, open, sheltered sites with an abundance of its usual foodplant locally: *Rumex acetosella*. Recorded in SY8192 in 2020. It is potentially established though, so far, there is a limited amount of its foodplant growing in disturbed areas, so breeding is unconfirmed.

#### **11 Common Blue** *Polyommatus icarus*

Males and females have both been recorded frequently in SY8192 between 2019 and 2021. They are usually encountered singly, nectaring on *Pulicaria dysenterica* and no evidence of breeding has been noted to date.

#### **12 Holly Blue** *Celastrina argiolus*

A male in SY8192 in 2021. A highly mobile butterfly, it almost certainly passes through the reserve more frequently than this single sighting would suggest. Its two main foodplants: *Ilex aquifolium* and *Hedera helix* are frequent here but not enough grows in the sort of sunny, sheltered situations that might support a permanent colony.

#### 13 Red Admiral Vanessa atalanta

A highly mobile visitor recorded in SY8192 in 2021. No evidence of breeding as yet.

#### **14** Painted Lady Vanessa cardui

A highly mobile visitor recorded in SY8192 in 2021. No evidence of breeding as yet.

#### **15 Small Tortoiseshell** *Aglais urticae*

A highly mobile visitor recorded in SY8192 between 1998 and 2021. No evidence of breeding as yet.

#### **16** Peacock Inachis io

A highly mobile visitor recorded in SY8192 in 2021. No evidence of breeding as yet.

#### **17 Comma** *Polygonia c-album*

An infrequent visitor recorded in SY8092 in 2018. No evidence of breeding as yet.

#### 18 Silver-washed Fritillary Argynnis paphia

A highly mobile visitor recorded infrequently in SY8192 between 2007 and 2021. No evidence of breeding as yet.

#### **19 Speckled Wood** *Parage aegeria*

Occasional in the wooded areas of SY8192 since 1982.

#### **20** Wall Lasiommata megera

One of only two species from the reserve on the butterfly Red List. It has been given the status of 'Near Threatened'. This is because the general distribution

trend is for a declining 'area of occupancy' (AOO, a term used in the IUCN criteria), sufficient to bring it close to the criteria for being classified as 'Vulnerable'.

This is indeed one of our fastest declining butterflies. On the reserve it has been recorded in SY8192 from 2019 to 2021. Though feeding as a caterpillar on a wide range of grasses, the Wall is particularly fussy over local conditions, preferring hot, sparsely-vegetated spots. Conifer clearance has given it an opportunity for colonisation on the site.

#### **21 Marbled White** *Melanargia galathea*

A wanderer, recorded sporadically from SY8092 and SY8192 from 1998 to 2006. Not permanently established on site but liable to turn up anywhere in open, sunny situations.

#### **22 Grayling** *Hipparchia semele*

The other species on the butterfly Red List: the Grayling is give the status of 'Vulnerable'. This is because it has both a declining 'area of occupancy' (AOO) and a falling population over a 10-year span. Figures suggest a population decline of 30-49% in the period over which the IUCN criteria were assessed. This is one of the great success stories of the Erica Trust reserve. Graylings rapidly appeared after conifer clearance and are now well established in square SY8092.

#### **23** Gatekeeper Pyronia tithonus

A widespread and common species. Recorded in SY8092 since 1998. There are remarkably few records. This may be due to either severe under-recording, or perhaps because it was historically found on the lusher verges fringing the reserve and has yet to fully establish itself in the central core of the area.

#### **24** Meadow Brown Maniola jurtina

A widespread and common species. Recorded in SY8092 and SY8192 since 1998. There are remarkably few records. Possibly due to severe under-recording or perhaps because it was historically found on the lusher verges fringing the reserve and has yet to fully establish itself in the central core of the area.

#### **25 Ringlet** *Aphantopus hyperanthus*

A butterfly of lusher, shadier grassy areas, recorded in SY8192 in 2011. It is the one species least likely to respond to restoration of heathland, so it will probably only ever be recorded on the southern fringes of the reserve.

#### **26** Small Heath Coenonympa pamphilus

Occasional in SY8192 since 1998 but very sporadic and local and with no recent records from the heart of the reserve. The Small Heath prefers open, well-drained soils dominated by fine-leaved grasses. Hopefully it will respond to grazing, as the near-monoculture of *Molinia caerulea* in the open heath is gradually broken up.

#### Discussion

These 26 species on this list represent 74% of the 35 species recorded from the parish, a significant proportion of the local fauna.

Two of the species found on the reserve have a conservation status of 'Near Threatened' or above (Fox, Warren and Brereton 2010). It is almost certain that these species have become recently established: neither of them was previously recorded from this site. This is encouraging evidence that the conservation management is already bearing fruit in improving the site: both for key heathland species and butterflies in general.

#### **Missing Species**

Nine species recorded in the parish in the last twelve years have yet to be recorded on site. Some of these are scarce and sporadic and probably not established as breeding in our area. Others have specific habitat requirements, so are unlikely to be found on site. The nine missing species are:

- Essex Skipper Thymelicus lineola

  Very local and sporadic in the parish. It has a preference for more open, drier, less lush grassland than that occupied by the Small Skipper. It has been recorded in the area, so may eventually become established as the Molinia is reduced.
- **Dingy Skipper** Erynnis tages

Scarce and local in the parish and with no nearby sites. Unlikely to colonise in the near future. Only the odd wanderer is possible and, even that seems highly improbable.

#### • **Grizzled Skipper** Pyrgus malvae

Since 2020 I have recorded this local and declining species at four sites – across four one-kilometre squares – in the parish. The nearest of these sites is only 400m away from the reserve boundary. A wandering specimen can't be ruled out but it is unlikely to colonise unless the reserve builds up a good population of its main foodplant locally, *Fragaria vesca*. Perhaps this could be introduced where crushed limestone has been used as a track ballast.

#### • Large White Pieris brassicae

The lack of records of this common, widespread and highly mobile butterfly is a good example of how things can gets overlooked if recording isn't done systematically. Although it has limited opportunities to breed on site it must be a fairly frequent visitor. Hopefully circulation of this list will 'flush out' records.

#### • Small Blue Cupido minimus

There is only one, isolated colony of this very scarce, local butterfly in the parish – roughly two kilometres away. The Erica Trust reserve has none of its larval foodplant (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) and is totally unsuitable habitat. There is no chance of it being recorded.

#### • Silver-studded Blue Plebeius argus

A population of this local and scarce butterfly breeds within two to four hundred metres of the Erica Trust boundary. Indeed, it's possible that dispersive adults have already strayed through the reserve, though I have yet to see one. Hopefully, when grazing or mowing have increased the amount of pioneer phase *Erica tetralix*, the Silver-studded Blue may colonise under its own steam.

#### • **Brown Argus** *Plebeius agestis*

Very scattered and local in the parish with none of its foodplants established on the reserve. Wanderers may potentially be seen, but it is unlikely to colonise.

#### • White Admiral Limenitis camilla

This lovely butterfly has an interesting history locally. It used to be found widely in the parish up to the 1980s and early 1990s (Thomas & Webb 1984, Thomas *et al.* 1998). However, by 1995 it had disappeared from our area (Shreeves 2005) and it has remained absent more or less continuously

since then. Between 2015 and 2019 a single example was seen and, for a while, it was hoped that this heralded a period of recolonization. Alas, this proved to be a false dawn and it hasn't been seen since.

Dark Green Fritillary Argynnis aglaja
 Recorded for the first and only time in the parish at Kite Hill in 2010.

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**Signs of Spring: Frogspawn**Photo by Helen Frost



### Signs of Spring: Blackthorn at Moreton Photo by Helen Frost



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/11 22 February 2022

In this edition we are pleased to have a special report by Mark Warn, Forestry England wildlife ranger. So here he is "without any further ado":

*Mark Warn*: Hello Parish Wildlife Readers. By way of an introduction, my name is Mark Warn and I've had the immense privilege of being the Forestry England (FE) Wildlife Ranger for Moreton Forest for the last 32 years.



I wanted to take this opportunity to give you a little bit of detail regarding the ongoing timber harvesting work in Moreton Forest. As I'm sure most of you would have noticed, the forest operations commenced around two weeks ago, and currently the teams are in the process of moving from Bryantspuddle Heath to Pallington Heath.

As with most of the woodlands in the Wareham area we look after, we work on a 5-year working cycle, this meaning that we will visit once every 5 years to complete all timber harvesting. The areas we look after in and around Wareham are the western most outpost of the South Forest District, encompassing both freehold (Moreton Forest being one of our freehold woods) and leasehold woodland located in the geographic triangle between Dorchester, Blandford & Swanage.

During the working period we will carry out any necessary tree thinning, whether for the normal plantation management or increasingly for continuous cover Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) where the encouragement of tree regeneration will have a greater focus. We also carry out any planned clear felling of trees, some of which may be to help us restore areas of heathland and open habitat critical to wildlife, or to plant more suitable tree species.

All our work is done in line with established Forest Design Plans (FDPs) which have been created with full consultation among the various stakeholders and partners that have an interest in the land we manage (e.g., RSPB, Natural England, Forestry Sector, Parish/County Councils, Landowners, Historic England etc. etc.), and FDPs also go out for public consultation.

The FDP is made up of three core maps, the 'Design Concept' indicating the longer-term future direction, the 'Felling & Habitat Management' detailing the timings for habitat management change and the 'Restocking Plan' indicating the tree species/habitat type.

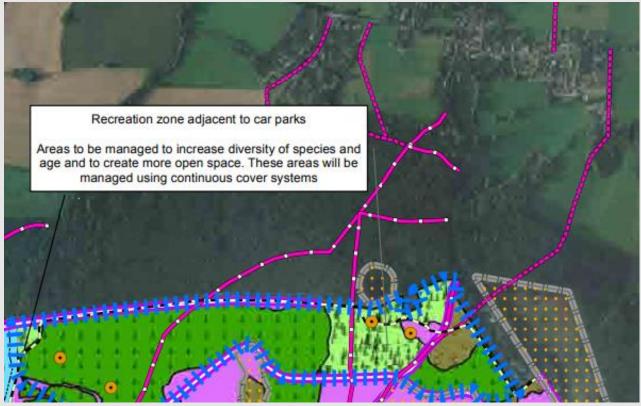
All our forest plans are on the <a href="www.forestryengland.uk">www.forestryengland.uk</a> website. The specific link to the above map is:

https://www.forestryengland.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Purbeck%20Forest%20Plan%20Affpuddle%20and%20Moreton.pdf

The 'Design Concept Map' from the Affpuddle & Moreton FDP (the future aspiration)



Excerpt showing Bladen Valley, Briantspuddle, Culpepper's Dish. Please see link above to access the complete map close-up.



Specifically at Moreton Forest during this working cycle, we are implementing several large clear-fells which will be restored over time to Lowland Heath, the said restoration will latterly involve raking and burning the resultant brash as well as following up with the control of Bracken, Gorse & Rhododendron. We are also carrying out normal silvicultural thinning to improve the retained crop trees, as well as thinning the northern half of Pallington Heath to favour existing broadleaved trees.

Overall, this work helps to create a mix of different habitats for wildlife. The work is likely to go on for a least another 2 months, and there will be timber movements for at least another 6 months after the finish of the harvesting activities.



New clear-fell south of Oakers Bog for Heathland Restoration

In addition to the aforementioned clear-fells for heathland restoration, we are taking this opportunity to create a heathland habitat link between existing open areas in Bryantspuddle Heath and the newly established heathland on the Erica Trust Land on Affpuddle Heath. Although this area is not detailed in the FDP we are able to carry out small links of this nature as part of our ride edge enhancement programme, and undoubtedly when we come to renew the existing Purbeck Forest FDP in 2023 we will look to strengthen links to the Erica Trust habitat.

These links provide vital corridors for many wildlife species such as the UK's rarest lizard – the Sand Lizard, and existing colonies of the Silver-studded Blue Butterfly *Plebejus argus*. These connections allow populations to link up and expand across the heathlands, ensuring greater resilience into the future.



Male & Female Sand Lizard Lacerta agilis

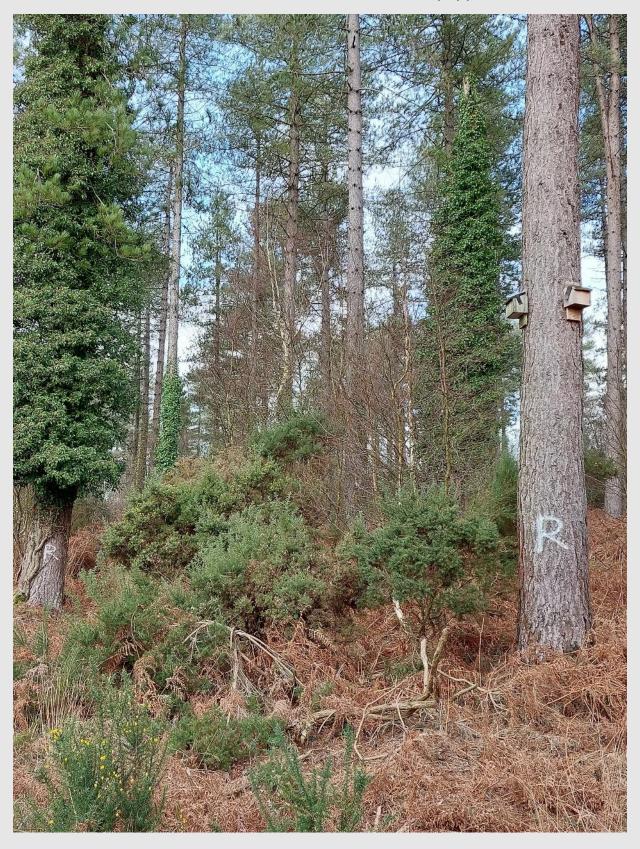
The current forest operations in Moreton Forest will produce in excess of 6,000 tonnes of sustainable timber, the majority of which will be used for agricultural and domestic fencing/buildings, as well as a small proportion being of building grade standard for home building & DIY. It is not always well known but that the majority of funding for the work we do to look after the nation's forests has to be self-generated. Producing sustainable timber offsets, the cost of running the Public Forest Estate and contributes many conservation projects and providing facilities to help the public access and enjoy these special places.



New clear-fell north of Oakers Bog for Heathland Restoration

You will undoubtedly see various colours of biodegradable paint sprayed on the trees around the operations area, these will signify a variety of things to the harvesting contractors including trees to fell, trees to retain, and boundaries of sensitive wildlife sites and archaeological interest.

Trees retained for Bat Conservation below Culpepper's Dish



I'm sure many of you are aware of the rich and varied wildlife that Moreton Forest contains, with all the key heathland species well represented and arguably some of the highest densities of certain heathland species found anywhere in Dorset. The list is endless but Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, Woodlark *Lullula arborea*, Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca*, Sand Lizard, Ladybird Spider *Eresus sandaliatus* & Silverstudded Blue Butterfly all feature in flourishing populations.

The forest also supports a wide range of birds of prey with the woodland elements of the forest providing their vital nest sites. Also present within the forest and totally dependent on woodland & scrub are Common Dormouse.



Much of my work involves ensuring we manage our habitats with a full awareness of the needs of the precious wildlife that the forest supports. One of the most challenging situations is the need to harvest timber throughout the calendar year, which as one can imagine brings its own issues in ensuring we protect wildlife through their breeding and hibernation periods. Unfortunately, the sawmills cannot simply survive on 6 months activity alone, and therefore a high proportion of my time will be spent liaising with the foresters and

contractors that carry out these vital timber production operations to ensure we work in the right areas at the right time of year and inspect all sites to ensure any disturbance to wildlife is minimal.

I should also take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers that contribute to the local FE management, and specifically to those of you amongst your own parish that have given so much of your own time to record wildlife and share the important sightings and records you collect.

Without you all my job would be infinitely harder!

Moreton Forest is like much of the woodland we manage across South Dorset, it's a wonderful mosaic of both woodland, wetland and open habitats. It provides not only some of the strongest populations of both heathland and woodland wildlife, but gives us all the space to enjoy outdoor recreation at the same time as being able to contribute to a sustainable way to the UK timber industry.

Thank you for reading this brief article, if anyone wants any more specific detail then please feel free to email me via <a href="mark.warn@forestryengland.uk">mark.warn@forestryengland.uk</a>

Mark Warn BEM 18<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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#### A general look around

Adrian Middleton: The garden has been pretty quiet of late, a time of frosts, strong winds, some heavy rain, even sleet and sunny blue skies. This Small Tortoiseshell was seen - very recently out of hibernation (a butterfly on the increase again?), along with a caterpillar of the Ruby Tiger moth in a flower bed.



Small Tortoiseshell Photo by Adrian Middleton

Apart from the usual passerines, an elusive Tree Creeper was seen on the tulip tree, quickly moving upwards and onwards -the first sighting for several years here, despite endlessly looking out for one.

Mark Warn BEM Forestry England Wildlife Ranger recently provided us with a comprehensive and very interesting report about some of the on-going changes in our local forest and lowland heath which will encourage many of our wildlife specialities (Wildlife Newsletter 2022/11). On another occasion around this time of year, Mark also pointed out a smart female Crossbill to me. It was flying up into a tree close by after drinking at a small pool - typical behaviour, but something which I might otherwise have missed. So many thanks Mark. All things part of the big equation. Lots to look forward to as Spring comes into its own.

#### **Erica Trust Woods**

Lesley Haskins: The Erica Trust woods cannot compete snowdrop-wise with Throop churchyard of course, but there are a few along the footpath west of the top of Bladen Valley. Just going over now.



Snowdrops on Erica Trust land Photo by Lesley Haskins

The wildtype daffodils, a tiny bit further on, which were donated by the parish council and planted by volunteers pre-covid, are just coming out, so worth a look. There seem to be rather more flowers coming on than last year and the hope is that they will continue to get more floriferous over time as they settle in.



Daffodil on Erica Trust land Photo by Lesley Haskins

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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/13 6 March 2022



Mating toads in amplexus surrounded by ribbons of spawn
Photo by Ian Cross

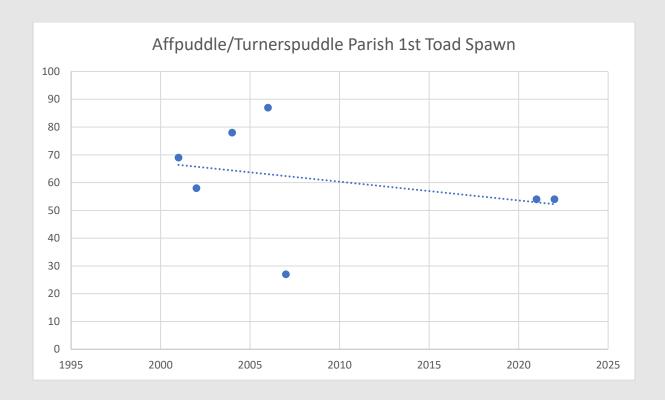
#### Toad spawn in the parish

*Ian Cross*: This year I saw my first batch of toad spawn on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February. This seemed exceptionally early, so it sent me off searching for my past records. When I found them it raised some interesting issues.

As most readers will know, toad spawn is not laid in 'jelly-like' clumps, as in frogs, but in neat ribbons. As the spawn is produced, the mating toads weave their way in and out of stringy water plants or any underwater obstructions. In

this case the toads had chosen to 'garland' the precious spawn among the twigs of a sunken branch (see photo).

When I checked my records (see the chart below) a number of things struck me. Firstly, this wasn't the exceptionally early date I had believed. In fact, it was exactly the same date as last year! Furthermore, there has been a much earlier spawning. In 2007 the first spawn was seen almost a month earlier, on the 27<sup>th</sup> January. That was indeed, an early year.



Beyond that, it was apparent just what a wide spread of dates was involved, with the latest date of first spawning 62 days later than the earliest. On top of this it was obvious just how patchy my records of toad spawning are, when compared with frogs. I can only think that this is because the number of sites where toads spawn on a regular basis in the parish are far fewer. I have to go out of my way to see toad spawn, whereas I can see frog spawn in our back garden.

I've inserted a trend line on the chart. The numbers on the left hand side are the 'ordinal' dates, with 1<sup>st</sup> January as day 1 and simply counting on, ignoring the months, so that the 31<sup>st</sup> March is the 90<sup>th</sup> day (and so on). The dotted

trend line seems to indicate that spawning is becoming a little earlier as the years progress – the line slopes down to the right.

However, this diagram should be taken with a **huge** pinch of salt. To be honest, you can't really read anything into these records as they are too widely scattered and there just isn't enough of them. I really need a lot more years of data before I can say if spawning in toads is genuinely getting earlier.

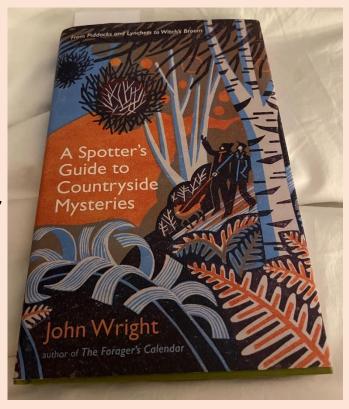
#### **Book Recommendation**

suggested by Julian Francis

Julian Francis:

I found it fascinating.

One of Britain's best-known naturalists, John Wright here introduces us to the natural (and unnatural) mysteries of the countryside, giving us the tools to identify Witch's Broom, Robin's Pincushion, Dew ponds and Hollow Ways, and also their histories, how they come to be, and where to find them.



### Redpoll Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: Lovely to see this splendid male redpoll in the garden this afternoon! Only my third view of one and it's come out well despite being taken through the window on a gloomy day!



### Firecrest at Moreton on 5 March Photo by Helen Frost



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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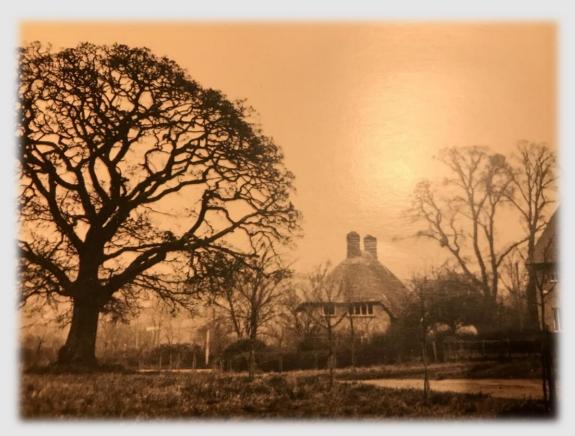
# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/14 9 March 2022



Oak at Bladen Valley Photo by Richard Killer

Richard Killer: If you have the Briantspuddle Shop/PO calendar for 2022 you will see the March photo of Bladen Valley taken 70 years ago, in February 1952, I think. The oak tree on the left is still there of course, right in front of our property and marking the boundary between numbers 3 and 4.

On Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March I took a photo and although I didn't quite get the angle right you can clearly see it's the same tree, the same twists and turns of the branches, the like top-line of the canopy.



Above: Oak at Bladen Valley in 1952 (Briantspuddle calender) Below: Oak at Bladen Valley in 2022 Photo by Richard Killer



Of course everyone asks me "How old is that tree?" and I don't really know. A helpful part of the Woodland Trust website suggests measuring the circumference of the trunk at about 1.5 metres height. That's approximately 4.5 metres and the guide says that a tree of 4.33m is 230 years old, one of 4.95m is 290 years old. So I think 250 years, the start of the Industrial Revolution, the era of Richard Arkwright and Abraham Darby.

I now realise how little I know about oak trees save that I think this one is a common English Oak. It will have its own ecosystem about which I know nothing. There will be bacteria and fungi living there, lichens in places, and other life forms. I know there have been mice in the base of the tree and also wasps in the base or very close by. And I know about the ivy which we need to keep an eye on. Squirrels dart about on it in warmer months and birds use it as a staging post.

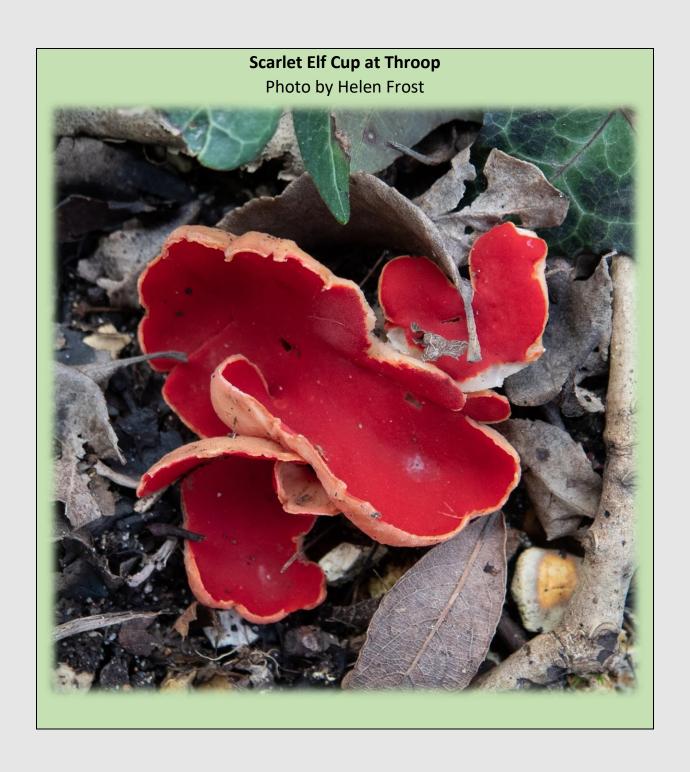
I wasn't around 70 years ago and I won't be in another 70 years but I think and hope the oak will be and much the same as 1952 and 2022. It's like a friend at the front of the building. We don't say much but just enjoy its company.

*Ian Cross*: An interesting thing about this tree is that, comparing the photos, the crown doesn't seem to have grown much in the past 70 years. This is probably because it has more or less reached maturity.

It is said of great oaks that they live for roughly 1,000 years: 300 years growing, 300 years as a mature tree and 300 years dying.

Richard is correct in his identification: this is indeed an English Oak (*Quercus robur*).

Stop Press: The first Chiffchaff song was heard on the 8<sup>th</sup> March. This welcome herald of spring is always the first of our migrant warblers to be heard. This is actually not a particularly early year and this one is 12 days later than last year.



#### **Out and About**

Adrian Middleton: So it's back to cold north winds again. But I took note the sun was warm enough for this queen wasp to emerge from one of my otherwise cold coal scuttles. There had been 22 chaffinches in the garden and a couple of bramblings were still about. A Bank Vole (resident?) is still showing and, out of character, was seen scurrying quickly along the length of the

terrace from one end to the other in a matter of two or three seconds (much faster than I would have been able to!).



Queen Wasp in coal scuttle Photo by Adrian Middleton

Without further ado, I headed off to an area of lowland heath in the parish. No adders were seen, but there were couple of Slow Worms about, one of which I show here. I was glad that I had gone.





#### **Goshawks and Tawny Owls**



Goshawk Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: these birds are all muscle and take on prisoners. This photo was taken at the Falconry Park at Lewell near Dorchester so if you would like to see one close up they reopen in April

Roger Hewitt: I hope everyone read Mark Warn's report on the ongoing work to our heathland, and a very comprehensive report it was. Thank you Mark. It was a shame that the work could not have been started in October, but I guess they cannot be everywhere in October. It is going to cause some disturbance to our wildlife. I have already seen the Goshawks having a look around in places I have not seen them before, but I hope they are resilient enough to stay around.

Most raptors build two or three nests over time and will move to a different nest site every now and then within their territory. There are still plenty of trees in our area, so I am sure they will be alright. To me we do not seem to have as many Tawny Owls in our area as there was, since the trees on Erica Trust land were felled. I have only heard one pair calling this year so far and to help out we have put up a Tawny Owl nesting box.



Tawny Owl box on Erica Trust land Photo by Roger Hewitt

A couple of pairs of Crossbills seem to have moved into the trees on Erica Trust Land. I have seen them there a few times now, so hope they are breeding. Sometimes when the ground gets roughed up, as on the heath now, some new plants come to life that have lain dormant for years. So keep your eyes on the ground as well.

#### Pied Jackdaw in Briantspuddle

Photo by Helen Frost



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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/15 14 March 2022



Marsh Marigolds at Briantspuddle Photo by Helen Frost

#### Feedback on Newsletter 14

Damien Lewis: Very uplifting - much needed right now!

*Marion and Jim Perriss*: A wonderful mix of information and photos today. It was very interesting to see the Old Oak tree in 1952 and in 2022. So good that it survived the storms.

#### **Daffodil ID question**

Helen Frost: I don't suppose these are WILD daffodils spotted on a bank under trees at Moreton? Pictures online of the wild variety seem to vary quite a bit. These were short but they foliage more green than green grey and no lemon yellow as is sometimes ascribed to them. I'd be glad of your input.



#### Daffodils in the parish

*Ian Cross*: Never has a plant been so widely and confusingly planted in wild situations, to the extent that its natural distribution has been totally obscured.

Our true wild daffodil is *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* subspecies *pseudonarcissus*. A good place to see 'wild type' daffodils in the parish is in the wooded strip that forms the northern boundary of the Erica Trust reserve (see photo below). Though even here they are not native, as this population was originally planted.

I am not convinced that we have any truly wild populations of daffodils in the parish. I see daffodils quite widely, here and there in woods, hedge banks, lanes and road verges in our area. However, on close examination, these always prove to be planted cultivars.

Helen's daffodils are not wild daffodils. A good indicator of the true subspecies *pseudonarcissus* is that the perianth: the six tepals that form the outer ring, are pale yellow, noticeably paler than the corona, the inner tube. (Note that the surrounding parts of the flower are strictly 'tepals' not 'petals', as they are composed of undifferentiated petals and sepals). The long, narrow leaves are slightly greyish green.



Wild type daffodil from the Erica Trust population.

The tepals are pale yellow, much paler than the corona. Photo by Ian Cross

I must admit that I am not a great fan of cultivated daffodils. I have seen our native wild daffodils in natural situations, where they form massed drifts in wooded valleys, undulating and flowing in a tide of yellow among the trees and

boulders of the banks of a rushing stream. In such a wild state there are few more glorious sights in nature.

Unfortunately, when planted by man, gaudily-coloured cultivars - that look like crude, plastic imitations – tend to be planted in rows; strange, isolated clumps; and even, god help us, circular clusters. The effect achieved is usually totally artificial: more like a flower arrangement than the celebration of a beautiful, natural spectacle that was presumably intended.

However, that's just my prejudice.

**Robin's egg**Photo by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: on Sunday 13th March in our garden, Christine found this Robin's egg which had been predated. The egg yolk was still very fresh and whatever took it may have finished off the rest of the eggs. There is no nest in our garden but one must be close by. It shows the birds are getting on with nesting.

**Crow**Photo by Helen Frost



Helen Frost: What an amazing variety of noises the crow makes - I particularly enjoyed the "twanging" instrumental notes - if you heard them in isolation, few would have known they were made by a bird!

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor, Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website Margaret Cheetham, Editor

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Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/16 16 March 2022 Stirred up frogspawn – photo submitted by Henry Hogger

Henry Hogger: I was interested to read about the distinction between frog and toad spawn. My daughter took the attached photo somewhere near the Culpepper's Dish car park, during a "puddle-jumping" expedition with the grandchildren. It's not very clear, as I think the puddle-jumpers had already stirred it up; but we think it might be frogspawn. Is that likely?

Ian Cross: Yes, ID confirmed as frogspawn in muddy water!

### Robin on Blackthorn Painting by Patrick Grove-White

Patrick Grove-White: Now that the Blackthorn is coming into flower, I thought you might like to add this newly completed picture in the Newsletter. This was one of my robins, but I subsequently regret not putting its mate in too!



#### In search of tigers

By Ian Cross

lan Cross: March may not seem to be the most promising time of year to search for our parish tiger moths. But I'm not talking about finding the moths themselves – this is the season to find their caterpillars. All our resident tiger moths spend the winter as larvae. They emerge with the first warm, settled days of the year and seem desperate to bask in the spring sunshine – and who can blame them.

Early stages of the Scarlet Tiger moth are particularly straightforward to find at this time of year if you know where to look. They are very adaptable and have an absolutely astonishing range of foodplants: both herbaceous and woody. Given this apparent willingness to try virtually anything, it's not surprising that the attractive caterpillars even turn up in gardens from time to time.

The Scarlet Tiger caterpillar –
surprisingly easy to find as it appears from hibernation
Photo by Ian Cross



You may be thinking, "if they eat anything, where do I even begin to look?"

However, even though they are spoilt for choice, when presented with the menu the caterpillars do seem to have favourites that they are consistently associated with. One such plant is Common Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*). To my mind this harks back to those distant times when the Scarlet Tiger was a scarce species, confined to certain water meadows.

Although this moth has since spread to occupy every corner of the county, it seems to me that it is to these old haunts that you must resort if you want a virtual guarantee of finding the caterpillars in early spring. At this time of year the vegetation is low, having yet to develop the impenetrable lushness of high summer. Tender, young leaves of comfrey sprout alongside the new shoots of nettles. If it is warm and sunny, it is to the fresh comfrey foliage that you are best advised to direct your search.

If you are diligent, the striking black and yellow caterpillars are easy to spot as they top-up their tans.

And a reminder of what the moth looks like

Photo by Ian Cross



#### Brambling in Affpuddle garden

Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: I find that contrary to what one might expect, the birds seem to come to the feeders even more in the rain - luckily today the rain brought one or two brambling into the garden - here's one of them!



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor; Campbell De Burgh,
Briantspuddle Community Website; Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/17 18 March 2022



Bank Vole Photo by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: Time moves on quickly but I find the continuing appearance of this Bank Vole (taken to be the same one) rather special. The new photo is perhaps more like a painting as Margaret kindly said of the first photo taken exactly 2 months ago. The animal has remained much longer than I ever expected but that's because of the appeal of a regular supply of feed. It is very slightly tamer maybe but with the distance between us more or less the same.

That day brought along my first garden Yellowhammer of the year to the lawn adjoining the terrace nearby but as always birds and vole appear at different times.



Yellowhammer Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### Feedback on Newsletter 16

Sue Barnes: I was interested to see the photo of the brambling.. I have never seen them before but we have had two in the garden this week!

#### Where and when to see them

In winter bramblings like beech woodland and farmland fields near woods. Look in flocks of chaffinches and other finches. In autumn look along east coast woodlands and fields. Bramblings will visit gardens in winter.

https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/brambling/

Stop Press:

1<sup>st</sup> Blackcap song at Briantspuddle on 17<sup>th</sup> March

#### **ID Question (Erica Trust land)**

Lesley Haskins: Jamie thinks this is *Tipula maxima* (but not for sure) which was ovipositing in wet moss in the hanging bog/stream this afternoon.



Photo submitted by Lesley Haskins

ID confirmed by Ian Cross. And here's some more information:

#### Tipula maxima

lan Cross: *Tipula maxima* is our largest cranefly and often said to have the largest wingspan of any British fly: anything up to 50mm. You'll also see figures quoted for an overall leg span of 100mm. Pretty impressive, though how on earth you measure this without breaking-off legs has always been a mystery to me!

Despite being a large, impressive and common species it doesn't seem to have acquired a common name.

Eggs are laid along the damp, mossy edges of ponds and shaded streams and the larva is semi-aquatic: spending its time, not in the open water, but just beneath the surface or in submerged leaf litter.

There's an established population around the pools of Smokeham Bottom on the Erica Trust reserve (where this mating pair were photographed in 2021, picture 1). The mossy, shaded series of runnels and pools, cluttered with fallen debris are so ideal they could have been specifically designed for this species.



Picture 1: A mating pair of *Tipula maxima* on the Erica Trust reserve – the female is in the foreground.

Photo by Ian Cross.

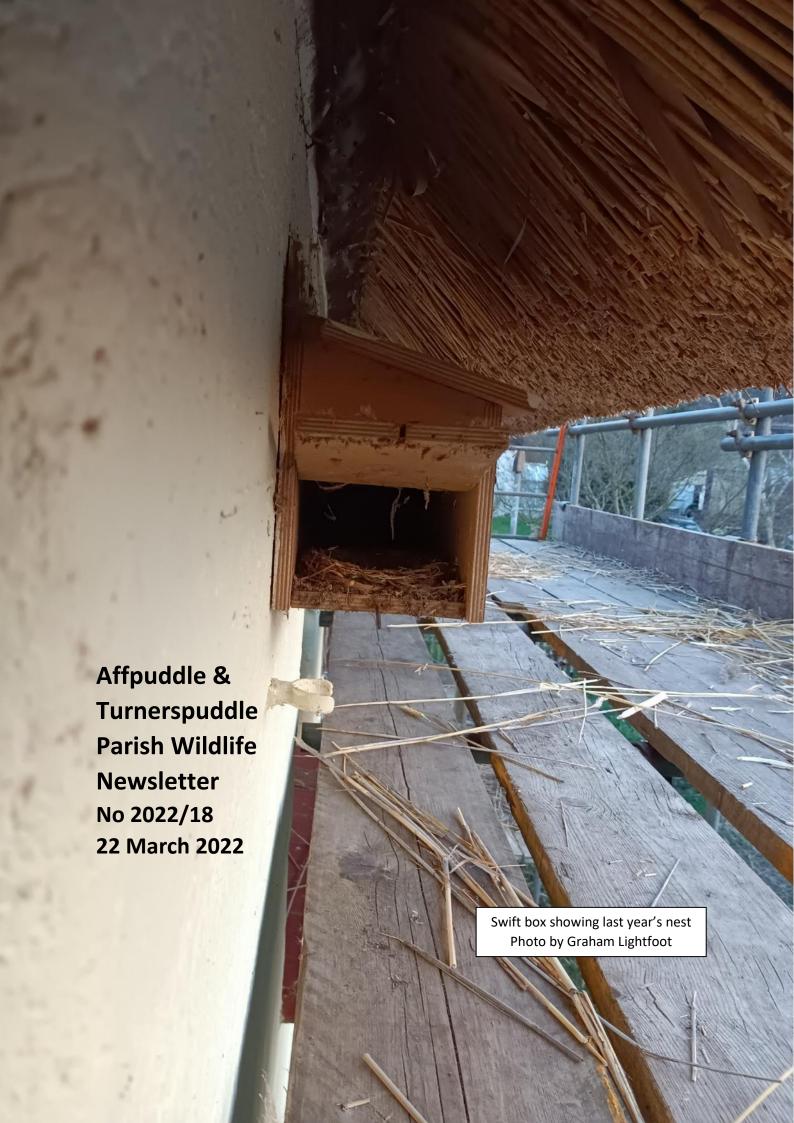
*Tipula maxima* belongs to a loose group of flies once called the Nematocera or 'thread-horns'. Mosquitoes and gnats belong to this assemblage, which are characterised by their elongate, thread-like, segmented antennae. These can be seen in the close-up of the female (picture 2).



Picture 2: A close-up of the female shows her thin, segmented 'thread-horn' antennae.

Photo by Ian Cross.

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#### **Encouraging Swifts**

Graham Lightfoot reports that he booked the rethatching so it would be finished before the swifts arrive (in late April). This means that the swift boxes wouldn't be blocked by the scaffolding. So – if you have swift boxes on your property, bear this in mind when booking your rethatching.

Thatching can be done any time after early August or before late April.

Another piece of advice from Graham is this: if you have "stoppers" to prevent sparrows and other birds from taking over the boxes, don't unplug until the last moment, when swifts start examining the boxes. You'll see them circling around, and you'll know they are ready.

Graham Lightfoot: Swifts which have nested previously come back late April early May, but if you are trying to get started, young birds first look for a nest site in late June early July and it is when you see this "prospecting" that ideally you should unplug. They will then spend a short time "practice nesting" before going off to Africa. They will return to your house if they survive in subsequent years.

The village hall swift boxes have been so successful that swift populations in the parish seem to be growing.

#### Rhododendrons

Jane Courtier: Wild rhododendrons (Rhododendron ponticum) may be spectacular when flowering, but they are problem plants in our forests because of their intensely invasive nature - once they get a toehold, they spread rapidly and often completely suppress other species of native low-growing plants. They have also been found to reduce both the numbers and the range of species of woodland breeding birds, and all parts of the plant are poisonous. It is not surprising, then, that control of rhododendrons is an

important part of forest (and heathland) management, with rhododendron eradication usually being the aim.

Walking on Throop Heath recently, I was intrigued to see lots of neatly tied bundles of long, straight rhododendron stems stacked up at the side of the track; then a little further on I came across a van with a sign saying "Rhododendron Harvesting". Apparently rhododendron foliage is in demand from florists, who value its dark leaves, particularly as a background for large displays and for making wreaths. The stems hold their leaves well and can cope with extended periods without water, so they are easy to keep in good condition.

Harvesters like to collect from plants growing in forests rather than in the open, because the quality is better - the stems tend to grow longer and straighter under the shade of forest trees, and the leaves are also protected from wind damage.



The glossy, dark leaves of rhododendrons make them a popular foliage plant with florists. Photo by Jane Courtier.



Above: Plants growing in more open positions are more likely to have damaged leaves, making them unsuitable for harvesting. Photo by Jane Courtier.

Below: Rhododendrons spread rapidly once they become established.

Photo by Jane Courtier



Harvesting the stems may help to slightly slow down the spread of the plants, but only to a very small extent, so it is not a useful control method - and in any case, the harvesters themselves are hardly likely to be keen on eradicating the plants. They are much more likely to want to keep them thriving so that they can come back to harvest them year after year.

It's interesting to learn that at least some people have managed to find a positive use for the usually hated rhododendron plants!

#### Follow-up on Daffodils:

Phil Ventham: May be a last call if anyone wants to see the daffodils planted in 2018 to commemorate young men from the village who never returned after the two World Wars. They were planted to supplement those said to have been planted originally by Lady Debenham after the Great War. They are located beside the footpath by the swallow hole in the woods at the top of Bladen Valley.

The daffodil bulbs were kindly provided by the Erica Trust and were planted by a small team of volunteers. They are believed to be species wild daffodils (Lesley could confirm?). They are in full bloom at the moment; go and enjoy them and reflect on why they were planted after 'the war to end all wars' - a hollow aspiration in view of the current conflict?

#### A host of opportunities

Ian Cross: The recent flurry of storms have caused the inevitable wind-throw. Most of this has now been cleared but hopefully, some of the towering root-plates will be left to slowly weather and erode over the years. In the photo below, 'one man and his dogs' is dwarfed by a wall of tangled roots and soil.

To the human perspective, where neatness and order are paramount, this looks like chaos and destruction. However, nature is indifferent to our need for tidiness.

Where we mourn fallen trees, nature sees an opportunity for a wealth of wood-boring insects and fungi. Where we see unsightly root plates, the natural world is quick to colonise the new, sun-baked, 'cliff' which provides a host of opportunities for soil-nesting insects. Where we are inconvenienced by the churned and furrowed soil, dormant seeds of heathland plants are quick to exploit their chance to germinate.

Of course paths must be opened and dangerous trees made safe but nature is quick to heal and it won't be long before all memory of the storms is erased.



Ian and two border terriers check out the potential for soil-nesting insects in the root plate (18 March) Photo by Margaret Cheetham

#### Tree Creeper at Affpuddle (near the Cattle barn)

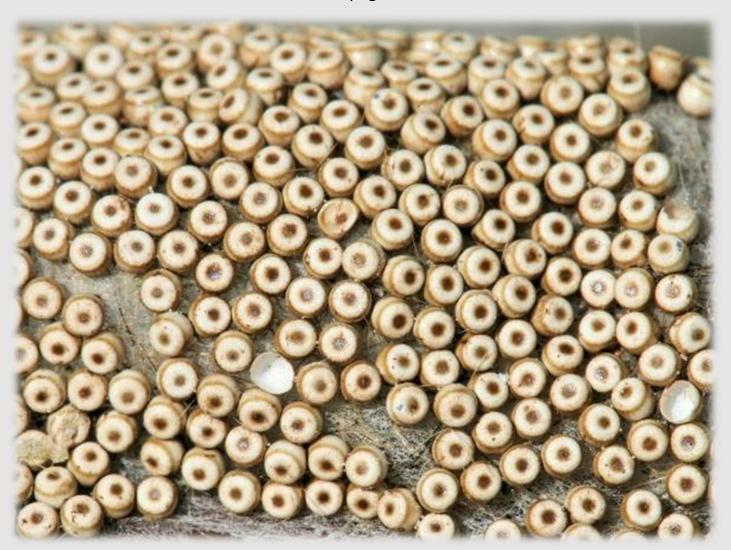
Photo by Helen Frost



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### Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/19 24 March 2022

Mystery Photo! What are they?
See page 4



#### **Trees for Dorset**

Margaret Clegg: they are dwindling in active members and may have to disband. We were wondering if you could put something in our newsletter and maybe some other like minded people would be interested in becoming members and perhaps save them from having to fold. Details from Rachel Palmer - 01929 462423.



#### **Mandarin Ducks**

Chrissie Garside: I just wondered if anyone else has had visits from Mandarin Ducks, they fly into my garden at dusk but are so skittish that I've failed to snap them! I understand from a friend, (who knows about these things) that they are quite naturalized now?? Is this so?

(The badger comes later and clears up under the bird feeders!)

*Ian Cross*: This attractive duck is understandably very popular in wildfowl collections. Escapes and introductions mean it is now widely established as a feral, breeding bird in the UK (though mainly in the south-east).

Our local birds may have originated as escapees from a small collection near Cecily Bridge. These birds seem to range quite widely and are liable to turn up anywhere along the Piddle and its environs.

#### The Hanging Bog

Lesley Haskins: Thank you for the ID of 'my', cranefly (Newsletter 17). I thought readers might like to know where I meant by 'the hanging bog' - which sounds more than a little ominous! This picture is taken looking down from the mid point of the valley which leads from the heathland permissive path down to the swallet hole immediately above Lady Debenhams Daffodils. This whole valley had previously been purposefully drained dry and planted with mainly exotic Western Hemlocks. Erica Trust's restoration here removed the Hemlocks to leave the few native birches and Scots Pines (some of which of course have subsequently fallen), blocked the modern drain, exposed the natural surface water flow, and created a small bund at the mid point break of slope (where I am standing to take the photo).

To our pleasure we are already seeing signs of returning former habitat - tricking water and wet woodland mosses below the break of slope (where the cranefly was ovipositing) and bog mosses (*Sphagnum* species) above it. The accumulation of bog mosses is called the 'hanging bog' because it 'hangs'

above the break of slope of the valley - just as another sphagnum bog 'hangs' above the little stream which flows down the far western end of our land.

And although you cannot see it, there was a tree creeper having a very merry time on those birches and which I was hoping to capture on camera - but it was far too far away of course!



The Hanging Bog Photo by Lesley Haskins

#### Vapourer Moth cocoon

The Vapourer Moth (*Orgyia antiqua*) is one of those species of moth that spend the winter, not as a caterpillar or a pupa, but in the egg stage. The eggs are fairly easy to find, even at this time of year, for one, peculiar, reason. Unlike almost every other species, the adult female moth goes to absolutely no trouble in placing her eggs. The eggs are simply laid on the outside of the cocoon in which the caterpillar turned into a pupa and from which the moth had recently emerged.

The cocoon is a simple affair: a silken web often stretched across the contours of a fork in a twig (picture 1). On close inspection the rough hole through which the adult moth emerged can be made out. Even in early spring, just before the eggs hatch, the hole remains, as clearly visible as on the day, many months before, when the moth herself emerged.



Picture 1 - The Vapourer Moth cocoon. The hole through which the female moth emerged can be seen on the right. Photo by Ian Cross.

It's not for lack of effort that the moth chooses to place her eggs like this. She has no choice. She can't fly from twig to twig, carefully selecting the appropriate foodplant and taking great pains to conceal each egg. She can't fly

at all, as she is virtually wingless! The recently emerged female is little more than a hairy sack of eggs (picture 2).



Picture 2 - The female moth is wingless and is little more than a furry bag of eggs. Photo by lan Cross.

The eggs are densely packed and are actually quite attractive when you look closely (picture 3). Luckily, the fact that they are not distributed on carefully-selected foodplants is no great problem. The caterpillars can choose from an enormous range of plants on which to feed so, wherever the female ends up, suitable food is never far away.

Picture 3 - In close-up the tightly-packed eggs each bear an attractive 'bulls-eye' pattern. Photo by Ian Cross.

(See page 1 for enlarged photo)





Huddling together to keep each other warm! In a couple of days as they get bigger they'll start moving away from each other.



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor, Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website Margaret Cheetham, Editor

Please send your contributions to <a href="mailto:macheetham@hotmail.co.uk">macheetham@hotmail.co.uk</a>.

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### Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/20 28 March 2022



Above: Lesser Celandine and Wood Anenome on Erica Trust land.

Photo by Damien G Lewis

Below: Bank Vole. Photo by Adrian Middleton



#### One to look out for - the Dotted Bee-fly

*Ian Cross*: Six bee-flies are seen regularly in Dorset and four of these are found in the parish. Despite this, until recently a bee-fly seen in gardens in the early spring could be safely dismissed as a Dark-edged Bee-fly (*Bombylius major*) as this was the only one likely to be seen.

Then this all changed. For many years another species, the Dotted Bee-fly (*Bombylius discolor*) had a marginal existence as a scarce novelty that had to be searched for. Then in recent years they began to turn up regularly in all sorts of places – including gardens.

Now I see them every year in our garden. Though never as numerous as the Dark-edged Bee-fly, it is not uncommon to see several at a time.

Identification takes a little care. As the name suggests, the Dotted Bee-fly has distinct, almost circular, black dots on the wing veins (see photo 1).



Picture 1 - Dotted Bee-fly male: the dots are only visible at rest.

Photo by Ian Cross.

The Dark-edged Bee-fly has an irregular black cloud along the entire length of the front edge of the wings but <u>never</u> discrete dots (photo 2).



Picture 2 - Dark-edged Bee-fly female: a dark cloud along the leading edge but no dots. Photo by Ian Cross.

If all this sounds pretty straightforward, here comes the bad news: the markings are really only clearly visible when the wings are at rest. So, you have to patiently follow the fly, waiting for it to settle. You may need to get in quite close to appreciate details of the pattern.

So why has the Dotted Bee-fly had such a change in fortunes? One theory is that it is linked to the ups and downs of its host, the Ashy Mining Bee (*Andrena cineraria*) – photo 3. The Dotted Bee-fly is a parasite and lays its eggs in the nest burrows of the bee. The baby fly grows up, devouring the pollen that the bee has laboriously collected to feed its own larva.



Picture 3 - Ashy Mining Bee: host of the Dotted Bee-fly. Photo by Ian Cross.

The Ashy Mining Bee is now a feature of the parish, where it raises tiny 'volcano' mounds on garden lawns. With the bee has come the Dotted Bee-fly. The first Dark-edged Bee-fly appeared in the parish on the 18<sup>th</sup> March. Dotted Bee-flies were not far behind, first seen on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March. So, it's worth checking your garden to see if you have one, or possibly both, of these delightful insects.

#### The Bank Vole – a continuing story

Adrian Middleton: Much work has been carried out on small mammals including mice and voles over many years. Live trapping (with release) has especially helped to provide estimates on populations and distributions and to some extent on particular behaviour patterns of the individual species, sometimes whilst held in captivity where they may become quite tame. These animals also leave other evidence such as their nests, runs and burrows. The

common names of the two similar voles namely Bank Vole and Field Vole provide a general clue about favoured habitats of each of these species but they may use either habitat sometimes. The Bank Vole is the slightly smaller of the two species and has bigger ears and longer tail and the male has a richer red-brown coat.



Bank Vole Photo by Adrian Middleton

I have concluded the Bank Vole likes the wall by the terrace at the back of the house, whilst accepting grain (also for the birds) is the main attraction. With the warmer weather there have been some apparent behavioural changes by both vole and myself in this equation. The vole (I have only seen one as far as I can tell) has appeared more active, more exploratory and a little more confiding whilst I, rather than peering through the window, have begun approaching it from outside the house and so a little closer.

Whilst I am camouflaged by one or two of the nearby taller shrubs near the wall top, the vole will venture out of cover routinely within some four feet of me and will pass me by within a foot or so without apparent concern, on occasion. Nevertheless it makes a quick retreat should I become careless.

My fascination with the Bank Vole remains and hopefully my encounter with it will continue a while longer so that I can continue to learn more about this interesting little animal.



Woodland path Photo by Damien G Lewis

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/21 1 April 2022



Above: Lesser Celandine and Wood Anenome on Erica Trust land.
Photo by Damien G Lewis

#### Vapourer moths (Newsletter 19)

Jamie McMillan: I see the odd male flying by day quite frequently in summer, but only had them breed last year, when I found a caterpillar on Sallow in June. If readers are looking for them, they can be found on lots of different trees & shrubs. They seem quite partial to the rose family.

But if the female is flightless that begs the question: how do they disperse to new areas? One answer is that when the caterpillars have just hatched, they are mostly hair and hardly any body, which means that they can be carried on the wind like thistledown. I'm not sure how far this takes them, but I'd bet the caterpillar in the photo didn't arrive in my garden just by walking. The hairs on the bigger caterpillars are protective - and they can bring some people up in a rash, so please don't handle them!



Vapourer Moth Photo by Jamie McMillan

### **Redpoll**Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: if you look closely you can see that it has been ringed.



#### **Dark-edged Bee-fly** (Bombylius major)

Adrian Middleton: Following on from Newsletter 20, this very lively Dark-edged Bee-fly was photographed on a garden wall on a very sunny day recently.

Photo by Adrian Middleton



#### **Solitary Bees on Erica Trust land**

*Ian Cross*: I don't know if you have ever fancied having a go at identifying solitary bees but, if you did, the unseasonably warm spell in March would have been a golden opportunity to check out some of the species currently active on the Erica Trust reserve.

The solitary bee 'hot spot' at the moment is along the track that rises up along Smokeham Bottom from the road. As you walk up from the gate, about three

quarters of the way along, the track has a sharp kink as it enters a stretch between vertical banks nearly a metre high. This length in particular, is home to several species.

Chief among them is a small, but growing, aggregation of nests of *Andrena clarkella*. Look out for a roughly honeybee-sized insect that is velvety-black with a contrasting orange thorax. If you look closely, the incoming females have their hind legs clad in the lemon-yellow pollen of *Salix cinerea* - this bee is oligolectic on willow pollen. I was delighted to see this species here. Colonies come and go as nest sites become suitable then slowly deteriorate over the years. For me, this is the nearest colony to home and a chance to study them at a convenient site.

In constant attendance is its cleptoparasite *Nomada leucophthalma*. This bee is a vivid example of how parasitic bees can sometimes be more obvious than their hosts. I have been recording it here for the previous two years without seeing the host *Andrena*. *Nomada leucophthalma* is a lovely bee. It's one of the black, yellow and red *Nomada*. The red is of a rather dark, sullen crimson, so the thorax looks mainly black from a distance. The pale areas are of a slightly creamy-yellow shade, rather than bright chrome yellow. This difference can be quite distinctive once you get your 'eye in'. This is often the earliest *Nomada* on the wing each year.

Also here, I saw examples of *Nomada fabriciana*. This is a medium-sized, black and red *Nomada*. Its clinching identification feature, the bifid mandibles, are unfortunately only visible with a hand lens or under a microscope. I recently found its host *Andrena bicolor* nearby.

The track has lots of nests of the small, dark bee *Lasioglossum parvulum*, which is just starting to become very active. A tiny, glossy red bee *Sphecodes puncticeps* was entering nest holes and may be its main cleptoparasite on the reserve.

On *Potentilla sterilis* along the road edge I found the first males of *Andrena minutula*. This means that I have added four new species of bee to the reserve list over the past few days.

So, all in all, Smokeham Bottom is the place to see quite an assortment of early spring bees at the moment. As a bonus, I recorded both the two local spring bee-flies, *Bombylius major* and *Bombylius discolor*. Perhaps not surprising given the amount of solitary bee activity.



Woodland path Photo by Damien G Lewis

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/22 8 April 2022



Eli with Slow Worm Photo by Sam Spencer

#### Eli comes to stay again

Adrian Middleton: At the beginning of April, Eli and his family were able to make a long-awaited return visit to Affpuddle. It was good to see them and right away Eli and I were very much intent on carrying on our wildlife excursions where we had left off last year.

Although the weather was generally unreliable we soon had a good walk around the garden including a visit to the Compost Hotel. As if awaiting our arrival there we came across an adult male Slow Worm, an animal reminding us of our adventures earlier last year.



Slow Worm on the Heath Photo by Sam Spencer

The Slow Worm is a legless lizard, and this one also had a stumpy tail, having lost most of it a good while back, probably in some tussle or other. Closely resembling one I saw regularly last year it also had distinctive blue- black spots on its body, usually an adult male characteristic. It has remained relatively tame as the photograph with Eli suggests. We soon placed it back where we had found it and saw it again on several occasions later on.

During our time we visited David Bird, another snake enthusiast, and had a close look at a Milk Snake he was looking after. Whilst this very colourful snake is not one of our native species, Eli was delighted to be presented with a sloughed skin from this animal. Skin shedding is a procedure characteristic of reptiles generally and occurs several times a year.



Common Toad Photo by Sam Spencer

We were also able to make our very first joint visit onto some heathland nearby, and were rewarded with sightings of several more lively Slow Worms, a timid Sand Lizard and a somewhat sluggish Common Toad, all of interest to us. Later I was able to show Eli a Palmate Newt from the garden pond. So overall we had a nice introduction to reptiles and amphibians. He was clearly well pleased.

The week is passing very quickly, but already we can't wait to meet up once more and see lots more snakes and lizards and other interesting wildlife this coming summer.



Sand Lizard Photo by Adrian Middleton

**Erica Trust land**Photo by Damien G Lewis



#### Blackcap

#### Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: The blackcaps have arrived and there seems to be plenty of them around - this one at Affpuddle this afternoon (3 April 2022)



(The first 1st Blackcap song was heard at Briantspuddle on 17th March and reported in Newsletter 17)

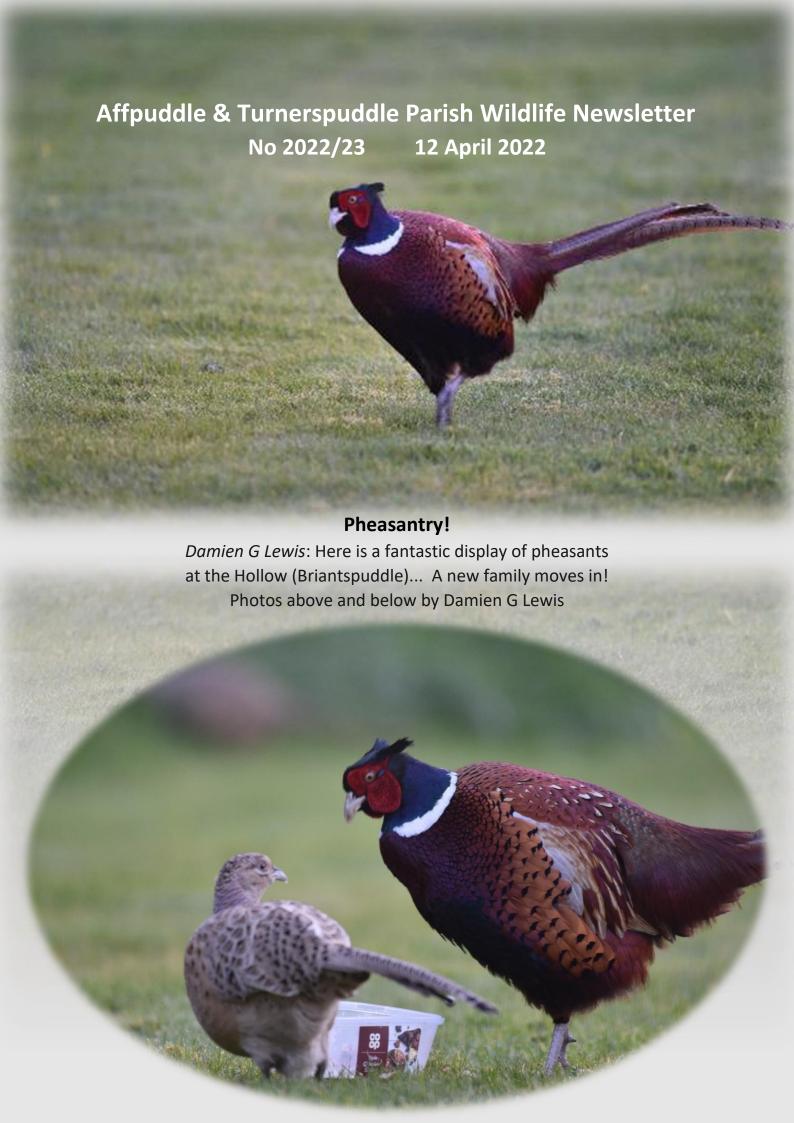
#### Redpoll and Siskin sharing Sunflower seed

Photo by Helen Frost

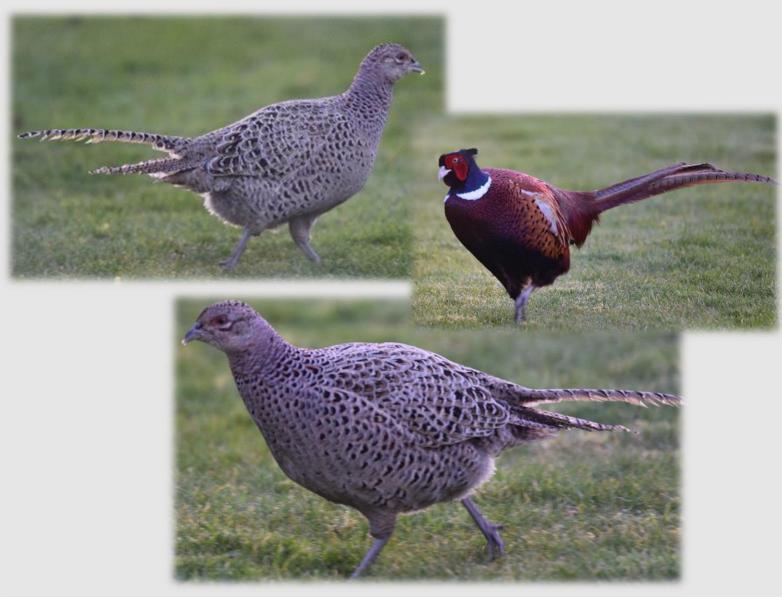


Helen Frost: Yesterday (31 March) saw several visits from a male redpoll, along with his siskin friends. Sadly, the light was not good for photography but I got a couple of snaps. I would recommend sunflower seeds as they have been avidly devoured by siskin, redpoll, greenfinch, goldfinch, robin, house sparrow and the fallen leftovers by blackbird, pheasant, dunnock, chaffinch and magpie.

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
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#### **Pheasants in Affpuddle**

Helen Frost: We have been having several cock pheasant in the garden over the year and we have named them Phil, Phillip, Phillipe, Filipe etc. Yesterday one of the "Phils" bought Philomena along. It is not often that I have been able to see a hen pheasant close up and I have to say I prefer them to the brash male!



Photo by Helen Frost

#### The unseen honeybee – the life of a drone

*Ian Cross:* The very name of this insect has become a byword for male laziness. Apart from this, few of us (apart from beekeepers) know much about, or have even knowingly seen, a honeybee drone.

To be honest, the reputation is not totally undeserved. It's thought that drones play a useful part in the regulation of the hive's temperature (vital for the developing baby bees) but, otherwise, have only one function in life. Their sole responsibility is to mate with a virgin queen to ensure the continuation of the species.



Picture 1: Drone Honeybee held in my fingertips – I'm perfectly safe as the males have no sting. Photo by Ian Cross

Drone honeybees are similar to the familiar workers (see picture 1). They are a little larger - though not as big as the queen. At a glance they will be readily dismissed as just another honeybee, though there are a few interesting differences.

The main one is the eyes, which are so big that they meet on top of the drone's head (picture 2). The reason for this is that the drone's one big moment involves a high-speed pursuit of an unmated queen. He needs good eyesight to be able to pick her out against a vast expanse of sky.



Picture 2: The drone's eyes are enormous and meet on top of his head. His mandibles, on the other hand, are feeble. Photo by Ian Cross

In contrast, his jaws are pathetic little things when compared to the powerful mandibles of a worker or queen. This is because he takes little interest in the day to day activity of the hive. He doesn't build cells, clean the hive, collect pollen or have anything to do with the upbringing of the baby bees.

Once he becomes an adult bee, the drone's existence is only, on average, 30 days. There's little to do other than tuck into the nectar stores from time to time, to ensure he is always fuelled-up for his one starring role.

With hundreds of other drones from neighbouring hives, he makes his way to a special rendezvous place and competes with all his compatriots to pursue visiting queens and, if he is lucky, be one of the very, very few to mate. I say lucky, but passing over the package of sperm is an explosive affair – absolutely fatal to the male bee. Mating is the last act of his brief existence.

**Nuthatch** collecting bark to line its nest at Moreton on 3 April

Photo by Helen Frost



Helen Frost: First swallow seen flying over Affpuddle Church on 8 April

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/24 15 April 2022





Photos by Lucy Sherwood

Lucy Sherwood: We have a mystery for you that we found in our shed and love your help please? As we went to fill our bird feeders discovered someone's moved into a bag of peanuts. We were wondering who it may be, they don't seem to be there anymore but put it back just in case they did return.



Mice or shrews, or maybe birds? There's a hole in the shed roof above where they must be coming in. Such beautiful work gathering leaves and breaking up bits of fabric to create a very cosy home indeed, with lots of nuts to eat too.

Many thanks - Lucy, Chris, Billy & Max - 24 Briantspuddle

*Ian Cross*: mice and voles are the most likely candidates. They must have thought they were in heaven!

#### Stop Press.....

Anne Colquhoun: Just heard my first cuckoo, loud and clear! (12 April)

Chrissie Garside: House martins are back at Throop Farm, so happy to see them! (13 April)

#### **Throop Updates**

Vivi Armitage: There has been a lot of bird activity since the weather warmed up a bit and spring has sprung. The first swallows appeared over Throop on 4th April, which was 4 days later than last year and 2 days earlier than 2020. However, no sign of any house martins yet. (last year they were around on 3rd April)

Has anyone else heard a cuckoo? Alec thought he heard one up at Throop Clump on 8th April but nothing since.

The house sparrows have moved into 4 of our nesting boxes and have also made themselves at home under the eaves, on the Virginia creeper and around the thatched part of the house.

A pair of jackdaws have gathered lot of sheep's wool Insulation which was wrapped around my frost vulnerable plants. They are trying to build a nest under the eaves too alongside some starlings -not so popular with the owner!

The jackdaws are hedging their bets though and also making a nest in a local ruined barn so we hope they decide to lay in that one instead.

A pair of flycatchers are back nesting in the ash tree near Throop Bridge where they nested a few years ago.

Throop is definitely going Oriental, with both pheasants and Mandarin Ducks visiting our bird tables. They seem to have visited several of the houses in the village.

We keep finding Buff-tailed Bumblebees lying in a comatose state in the garden. We have managed to revive a couple with a small amount of sugar dissolved in water. Does anyone know why so many seem to be keeling over no weed killer or sprays are used here? The honey bees appear healthier and have been numerous on sunny days on the camellias.

*Ian Cross:* The bumblebees might have been caught out by a cold or damp spell. Well done for reviving them.





Mandarin Duck (male) Photo by Alec Armitage



Pheasants and Mandarin Ducks Photo by Alec Armitage

#### A spring walk in the woods – Erica Trust land

Photo by Damien G Lewis



#### Redpoll and Siskin sharing Sunflower seed

Photo by Helen Frost



Helen Frost: I saw several visits from a male redpoll, along with his siskin friends. Sadly, the light was not good for photography but I got a couple of snaps. I would recommend sunflower seeds as they have been avidly devoured by siskin, redpoll, greenfinch, goldfinch, robin, house sparrow and the fallen leftovers by blackbird, pheasant, dunnock, chaffinch and magpie.

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#### Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/25 26 April 2022

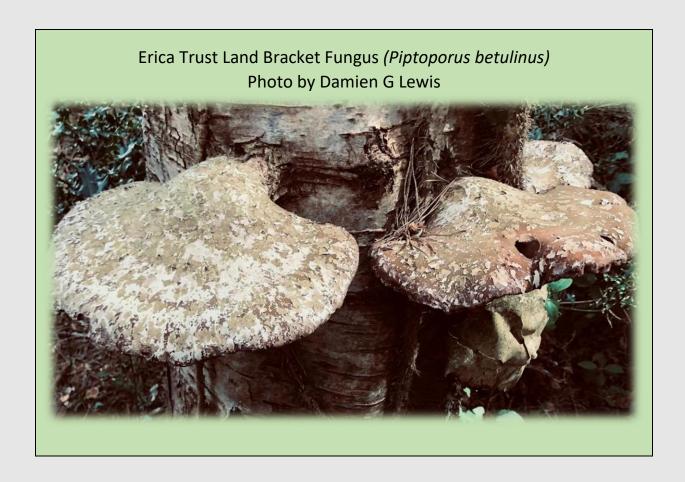


Signs of Spring in Affpuddle and Moreton – Photos by Helen Frost



### Erica Trust Land Bracket Fungus (Piptoporus betulinus) Photo by Damien G Lewis



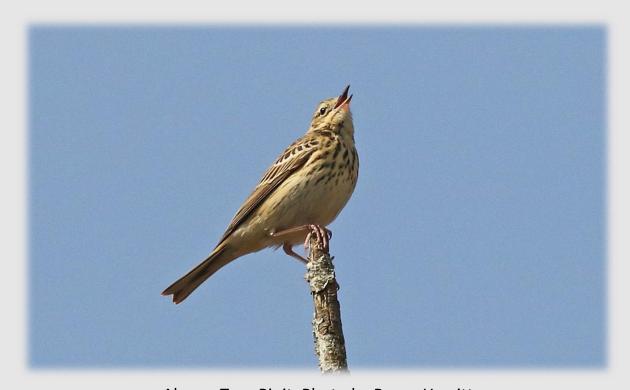


#### **Bird Report**

Roger Hewitt: On 20<sup>th</sup> April, Oakers Wood was alive with bird song. I saw my first Willow Warbler of the year and seven Tree Pipits also singing, spread over different parts of all our heathland. A Peregrine Falcon put in a brief appearance and I also had a brief view of our Little Owl. There were no Reed or Sedge Warbers yet, but the Cuckoo was around the Oakers Bog area. There were just a few Swallows and one Sand Martin. According to the Portland Bird Observatory, they think bird migration is running a week to ten days behind.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April I took an early morning walk in the Briantspuddle water meadows and found Sedge Warbler and Reed Warbler along the river. Also I heard a Garder Warbler singing a couple of days ago. The Sedge Warbler was doing a lot of display flights and singing while the Reed Warbler preferred to stay out of sight, low down in the reeds, but singing most of the time. Both

should have stayed quiet because the Cuckoo was close by! The Cuckoo seems to spend early morning in the meadow then move back up to the heath.



Above: Tree Pipit. Photo by Roger Hewitt Below: Sedge Warbler. Photo by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: A few butterflies are out enjoying our bit of sunshine, including Orange Tips and Speckled Wood. We saw an early Holly Blue in early April.

#### **Crossbills in the Parish**

Helen Frost: I have been in touch with the Assistant Recorder at Dorset Bird Club who says: "we get very few confirmations of breeding in Dorset although we think they are quite widespread in some years. It is a protected species so you are quite right to be cautious about giving the location. We will enter it onto the records database but won't put it on the daily sightings blog".



Crossbill Photo by Helen Frost



Female Hairy-footed Flower-bee on Lungwort
Photo by Helen Frost

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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/26 27 April 2022



Photos by Mark Warn



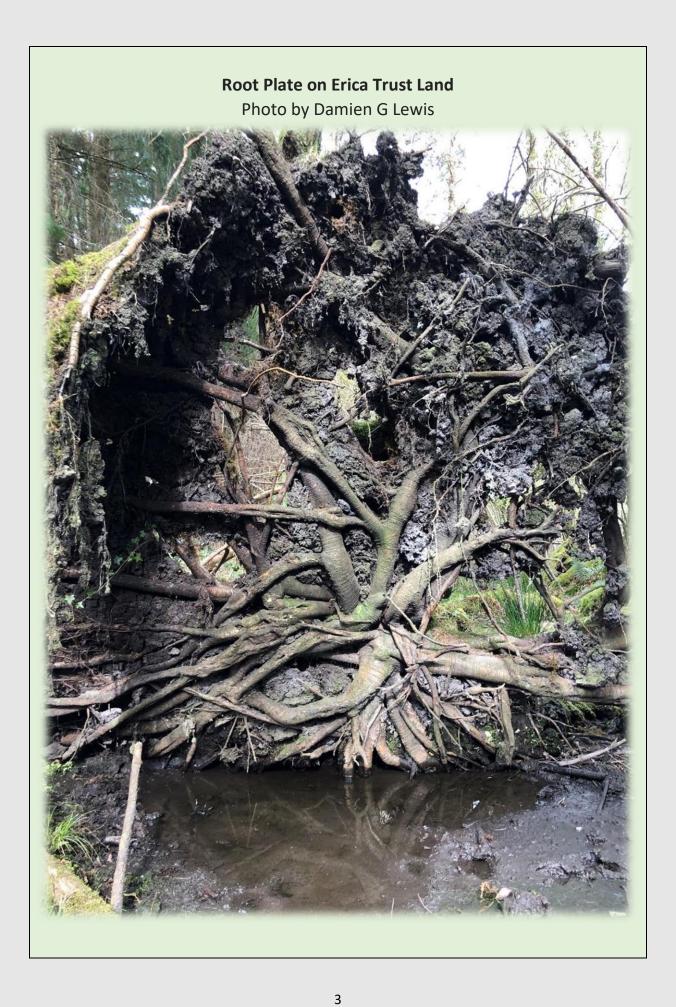


Photo by Mark Warn

Mark Warn: Over the next few days we will be returning the grazing cattle to Affpuddle & Bryantspuddle Heath. The stock have been in their wintering quarters under the watchful eye of our Grazier Jake Hancock. Jake and his family manage Wessex Conservation Grazing and are based not too far away in Tincleton.

The cattle will be on the forest for the summer months and early autumn. Their key role is to help manage the open heathland habitats within the forest.

With a preference for grasses they ensure the more fragile heathland plants are enhanced, whilst at the same time they provide a valuable wildfire protection role through a reduction in flammable vegetation.



Tangled Trees on Erica Trust Land Photo by Damien G Lewis



Robin with nesting material –

Moreton on 12 April Photo by Helen Frost



#### Corn Bunting in Affpuddle Photo by Helen Frost



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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/27 4 May 2022



Check out what's nesting in the water pump at the Old Vicarage in Affpuddle (see last page).

Photo by Frank Guinn

#### **Bluebell Woods**



Painting by Sue Taylor

And continuing with the bluebell theme:

Lesley Haskins: Right at the crest of the woodland slope, where it levels out onto the restored heathland, I came upon this enclave of bluebells - rather beyond their normal 'soil type comfort zone'. Possibly badger activity has brought up slightly richer soils from below to allow the bluebells to thrive

here. In this location, and a few others, a spattering young exotic conifers has been left for now to provide some cover whilst the heath is generally lacking in any other small trees. They will be taken out eventually when we have some young native birch, pine and rowan of moderate size established to take their place.

Our cattle will also be back quite soon to munch the *Molinia* - a few more than the 3 we had last year. Like the ones on the Forest England land they come from Jake Hancock.



Enclave of Bluebells on Erica Trust land Photo by Lesley Haskins

#### **Araneus diadematus**

Spiderlings in our garden in Affpuddle (common names include cross spider and crowned orb weaver)

Photo by Helen Frost



**Swallow** on the wire outside our house on 26 April Photo by Helen Frost



Nesting in the water pump (see page 1) Photo by Frank Guinn



Frank Guinn: Great Tits have been nesting in the old water pump in the north garden for well over 10 years, but we have yet to see how the young fledglings escape. Quite a feat!

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/28 8 May 2022



Three-veined Sandwort Photo by Jamie McMillan

Jamie McMillan: It's not very often I find a new plant these days, but Lesley managed to get me out to Lee Wood (Erica Trust land) to see bluebells, and I found a chickweed I couldn't ID. It turns out to be Three-veined, or Three-nerved Sandwort, Moehringia trinervia. There are oddly few records of this

supposedly common plant in this area (one in Thorncombe Woods, a few at Arne), but I must admit I had never seen it before.

Ian Cross: A quick look at the parish plant list reveals that Three-nerved Sandwort is one of 18 species of sandwort, chickweed, stitchwort, campion, etc. from the family Caryophyllaceae found in the parish. The list describes it as: "local in shady woods and wooded verges" in Affpuddle-Turnerspuddle, with records from three of the one-kilometre squares that form the parish.

The photo below was taken on a road verge near Throop Clump, a strip of wooded road verge that regularly produces examples of some of our more unusual woodland plants.



Photo by Ian Cross

### **Nest in the horse trailer!** Photo by Anne Colquhoun



Anne Colquhoun: I was just about to drive off with the horse trailer when I noticed this little nest in the hay net. Luckily no eggs in it, and I don't think it was occupied. I relocated it as best I could!

Ian Cross: Possibly wren. Lucky you caught it before the eggs were laid.

**Solomon's Seal Sawfly** Photo by Julian Francis



Julian Francis: Laying their eggs now. Soon the leaves will be in tatters!

Tree Pipit at Oakers Wood Photo by Helen Frost







Spring garden at 16 Briantspuddle Photo by Rose Cheetham

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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#### Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/29 16 May 2022



Painted Lady on a Lady Fern Patrick Grove-White

#### **Butterfly Update - 14** species seen so far



Small Copper Photo by Roger Hewitt



Green Hairstreak Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: Butterflies are building up slowly. Despite being nice and sunny there is still a bit of a nip in the air at times. Orange Tips, Holly Blue, Wall Brown, Brimstone and Speckled Wood are doing okay. There are some nicelooking Large Whites out now. Small Copper and Green Hairstreak are always in small numbers. I have only seen one Grizzled Skipper so far and I hope I can report a few more next time.

#### **Bird Migration Update**

Roger Hewitt: Bird migration has been on the slow side this spring, with numbers down at coastal hot spots. But there's still time for us to find something special. Some of the rarer migrants turn up in the first two weeks of June. Our position in relation to the south coast does not help us with spring migration. Some birds stop as soon as they hit the coast and feed up, then they will fly straight over us to their breeding grounds. Others, if the weather is right, do not stop at the coast and will fly straight to their breeding grounds.

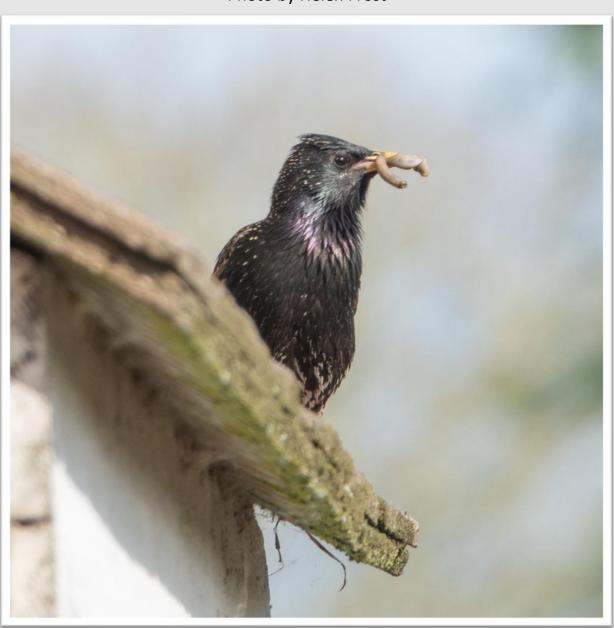


Northern Wheatear Photo by Roger Hewitt

On their return migration in the autumn, a lot of young birds are building up their fat reserves. As they take their time we get a chance to catch up with a few more than in the spring. However, I did see this Northern Wheatear (above) in the meadows on the 4<sup>th</sup> May.

There are a few more Reed and Sedge Warblers around now and they have caught the eye of the Cuckoo! I have only seen one Hobby in the parish so far and I hope for a few more soon. Red Kite sightings should pick up this month - I did see one fly over our house while I was eating lunch. The Barn Owl at Throop is doing his best, taking food back to one of our boxes, so I will be keeping an eye on them from a distance.

Starling feeding young in cottage roof, Affpuddle
Photo by Helen Frost



#### Oakers Wood Updates



Above: Fledgling Blackcap. Below: Firecrest. Photos by Helen Frost



#### Adder Photo by Adrian Middleton



**Bird updates** on 10 May (*Roger Hewitt*): 3 Nightjars singing and 1 flying around on Erica Trust Land tonight. Also a Mistle Thrush was singing late right alongside of us in Briantspuddle. Such a beautiful song. The Cuckoo was still calling at 9.30pm

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/30 22 May 2022

Right: Female Great-Spotted Woodpecker

after eating sunflower seeds

from the feeder

Below: Hare at Moreton

Photos by Helen Frost



#### An Early Lunch – Almost

Parish resident (anonymity preferred)

These photos were taken by the back door just after 11.00 on the morning of 21 May. The snake had the toad in its mouth and tried to drag it behind the bins. (snake equivalent to behind the bike sheds?). A few minutes later the toad escaped and the snake went up the steps into the garden.



Close-up below, you can just see the grass snake's head poking out from behind the toad.



*Ian Cross:* Toads deal with snake attacks in a very characteristic way. They inflate themselves to their greatest extent, hold their legs out stiffly and defy the snake to swallow them! This strategy makes it very difficult for the snake to get its jaws around the toad and is usually remarkably effective — as on this occasion.





Toad escapes to live another day.

## **From the Allotments Plantation**

Patrick Grove-White: So much happening in my little woodland now, I can't paint fast enough to keep up with it all!

Featuring a Large White, a Clouded Yellow, A Pale Clouded Yellow Hoverflies (beneath the Large White) and Buff-tailed Bumble Bees



# A very yellow-looking Green Orb Spider Photo by Jaffar Abbas



lan Cross: This is a female of either Araniella cucurbitina or Araniella opisthographa — these two can only be distinguished under a microscope. The former is sometimes called the 'Cucumber Green Spider'. This strange name is derived from its Latin name 'cucurbitina'. As far as I know the spider has absolutely no connection with cucumbers. However, I can always seem to remember these names as I always think of the spider as being a rather refreshing bright green — a bit like a cucumber.



Cucumber green with a contrasting tomato red spot – just like a summer salad!

Photo: Ian Cross



# Mowing for wildlife at 16 Briantspuddle Photo (and mowing!) by Rose Cheetham



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## More Butterfly Updates...

Roger Hewitt: We did find some more Grizzled Skippers - five on one site in the parish, but still none on the other site in Moreton Plantation. I sort of hope they came out early and I missed them. But we did find this Dingy Skipper there. We have not seen it here before. It beats me as to how they survive as you only ever see them one at a time in our parish. I guess there must be a few more somewhere.



Grizzled Skipper (above) Dingy Skipper (below) Photos by Roger Hewitt



There has been bit of an influx of Painted Ladies again. I am seeing three and four at a time here and there. Common Blues now starting to show as well.



Painted Lady Photo by Roger Hewitt

Female scorpion fly at Throop on 19 May Photo by Helen Frost



**ID Question sent in by Helen Frost** 



*Ian Cross*: It's an Ichneumon. Possibly something called *Dolichomitus*, but without a specimen even the genus is difficult.

#### **Dragonfly Updates**

Roger Hewitt: Dragonflies are starting to show now - Large Red Damselflies, Four-spotted Chasers, Keeled Skimmer, Azure Damselflies and Broad-bodied Chasers. The Emperor Dragonfly is also out.

When Ian and I finished looking for dragonflies on Erica Trust land last year, Ian commented that we must look earlier next year. Well, he's in sunny places and has left it to me. His thoughts were that we would find Downy Emerald on the big ponds. Well, I have looked and I'm glad to say he was right. I have found them here, but no photo yet as they are very tricky to photograph. However, I'll try again.



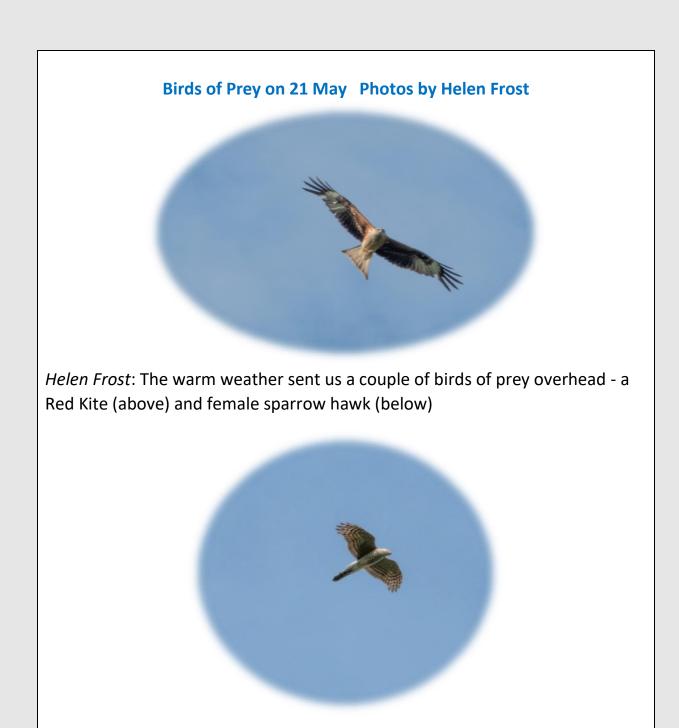
Four-spotted Chaser Photo by Roger Hewitt



Keeled Skimmer Photo by Roger Hewitt



At Moreton on 17 May - a Broad-bodied Chaser Photo by Helen Frost



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#### **Striped Hawk-moth**

#### Text and photo by Jamie McMillan

Jamie McMillan: Striped Hawk-moth is a Southern European & North African species which can undertake long migrations. There has been a big influx into Britain recently (along with Painted Lady butterflies from the same area), so I wasn't totally blindsided by this one. In fact I'd put my trap out specifically in the hope of catching one - in exactly the same spot where I caught my only other rare hawk-moth, Bedstraw Hawk-moth, a few years ago.



As it happened, it never entered the trap. Wide awake at midnight, I decided I was suffering from night-hunger. As I was raiding the kitchen. I glanced out of the window at the moth trap, and a small pale ghost drifted past it on

hummingbird wings. It looked small and sleek in flight, and was obviously a Hawk-moth. Panic stations, but I managed to catch it with only a plastic insect pot (no net to hand immediately), and it was indeed the hoped-for striped invader.

Unlike some hawk-moths, these do feed, and appear to be attracted to Red Valerian (on Portland anyway), so if you are feeling lucky, that is the place to search just after dusk.

PS I showed this to Roger Hewitt, who told me that Hugo Wood-Homer had caught no fewer than three in Puddletown.

You might be interested in my other hawkmoth sightings which can be accessed here:

https://www.flickr.com/photos/drinkermoth/collections/72157631311151950/

I thought I had lost access to my Flickr site when Flickr got hacked, but I have had it restored, & it is open for viewing now. I am currently re-ordering the moths to the new Agassiz numbering, so it is in a state of flux, but is still quite a useful local resource - once you have managed the navigation.

To Navigate:

Do not use the Flickr Photostream.

Start here at 'Garden Wildlife' collection:

https://www.flickr.com/photos/drinkermoth/collections/72157631309282134/

If you are on, say, Hawkmoths, use the navigation hierarchy with names of collections in blue, below the black Flickr navigation bar, to go back to Garden Wildlife, then pick another group, say dragonflies:

https://www.flickr.com/photos/drinkermoth/collections/72157631798255776/

I realise it is clunky, but it works as a way of moving about the collection.

#### **Roadside Verges**

(from the Parish Council)

*Graham Lightfoot*: Roadside verges can be valuable habitats for wild plants and animals and those which are maintained by Dorset Council will be managed to help meet objectives in their climate and ecological strategy. The "cut and collect" approach will be used increasingly to reduce verge nutrient levels and increase wildflower diversity whilst lowering costs and emissions as less cutting becomes necessary.

The Council already have a verge category "conservation verges" where cutting regime is optimised for particular plant communities. You can find these on the "Dorset Explorer" maps online.

The Parish Council hope to build up information about wildflower communities on verges in the Parish to help in this initiative and if you notice any wildflower species or communities on Parish verges which you feel are of particular value you are invited to send details of location with a photograph if possible to the Parish Clerk.

A Parish map can be found on the Briantspuddle Community Website and the Clerk can be contacted at <a href="mailto:affpuddleandturnerspuddleclerk@outlook.com">affpuddleandturnerspuddleclerk@outlook.com</a>

#### **Trainee wanted!**

Barry Shephard: I am looking for a locally based bird ringing trainee and would like to offer this opportunity to one of your bird enthusiasts. There is no age restriction at either end of the spectrum, although to achieve a permit which allows a someone to catch and ring birds on their own, a young person has to have reached 16. Training, though, can start well before 16. I am DBSed for young persons.

I find it a great thrill and privilege to catch and monitor wild birds. At the moment I am engaged in a structured project that enables me to follow the

progress of parent birds and their fledglings through the Spring and Summer months in a scientifically robust way. Wendy and I ringed a brood of house sparrow nestlings 10 days ago, and early last week a wonderful brood of nine blue tit babes. Both sets of youngsters fledged successfully and I hope to see and perhaps catch some of them to monitor their progress as the year moves on.

I have also arranged with our local farmer, to try my hand at catching house martins from our local colony as they hunt insects over the Frome water meadows. This is a new venture; it will be wonderful to add to the body of knowledge on this fascinating and mysterious little bird. All data from UK ringing is fed into a national data base held by the British Trust for Ornithology and from there is linked up internationally so that a ringed bird found anywhere in the world is traced and its travels recorded.

Although a reasonable knowledge of birds is handy for a trainee the essential requirements are enthusiasm, manual dexterity, good eyesight (specs not a problem) and a willingness to be bitten by belligerent blue tits! All necessary equipment is provided by the trainer (me). It is standard practice to start off with a few 'taster sessions' before any commitments are made. Once these are achieved training proceeds at a pace determined by agreement between the trainee and trainer. There is no set timescale or curriculum. All is determined to suit the individuals concerned.

Skills/permissions acquired would, of course, be transferable to Briantspuddle (or even further afield!).

I am happy for my email address to be shared with anyone interested or who would like to explore further. (Also 07734 007009 voice or text)

Best wishes, and thanks again for your inspiring newsletters. Barry Shephard (BTO Ringer & Trainer) barryshephard1@outlook.com

**ID Question**Photos submitted by Julian Francis



Julian Francis: is this a hoverfly or something different?

*lan Cross:* Yes, a hoverfly - a male *Xylota*. Do you recall the colour of the abdomen? This is either *Xylota segnis* (reddish abdomen) or *Xylota sylvarum* (black abdomen with yellow tip) both very common parish hoverflies.

Julian Francis: Thanks! It's Xylota sylvarum then, as the abdomen is black with a yellow tip.



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Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter
No 2022/33 7 June 2022



Daisies on the driveway at 16 Briantspuddle.

Photos by Audrey and Millie Grindrod.

**Young Long-tailed Tit at Moreton**Photo by Helen Frost



Young Great Tit in Affpuddle
Photo by Helen Frost



#### **Osmia Bee question**

Andrey Grindrod: I remember that I saw photos of what I think was called the Osmia Bee. (It sounded like that anyway). It made its nest in a snail shell. Then sealed up the entrance and went on to another shell. Sorry I don't have a picture of it. Do you have one? Could you show it? Are there any round here? Most interesting insects.

*Ian Cross*: Yes, you have the name right. We have five species of *Osmia* in the parish, which includes two species that nest in snail shells. Unfortunately, neither of them nests in gardens - but one is quite frequent on the chalk ridge or along limestone ballast tracks in Moreton Forest. This is the lovely *Osmia bicolor* (see photo below) which always reminds me of a miniature Red-tailed Bumblebee.



Osmia bicolor female - photo by Ian Cross

The male will guard a suitable snail shell (picture below) as he knows it is a desirable residence for the females and thus a good place to meet the opposite sex.



Male Osmia guarding a suitable snail shell – photo Ian Cross

#### **Red Kite**

Roger Hewitt: I have been doing a lot of raptor watches over the last month and we do have a good array of raptors in the parish. So I was pleased that the Red Kite flew over the field that the grass had just been cut for silage. They like this - as they glide gently over the field it's a good chance to spot small mammals.

It gave me the chance to get a few photos a bit different to the usual sky high ones. It was with me for around two hours at times, flying right over my head

but I wanted something different. It did oblige in the end, but at the far side of the field, so photos a bit distant.



Red Kite Photos by Roger Hewitt



Over the morning it made several passes looking for that meal but not sure if it caught anything other than a claw full of grass as in the photo. It did drop the grass after flying a short distance.

Another thing that was good to watch was a Sparrowhawk displaying. The speed of the steep dive, the sharp pulling up at the bottom and the rapid climb up again has to be seen to be believed. How it stops and turns at that speed is incredible. And the Hobbies have been good entertainment as well.

#### **Orchids**

Roger Hewitt: Orchids out on Turnerspuddle Heath. Now there are good numbers of Heath Spotted Orchids out, and a few I am not sure of.



Southern Marsh Orchid, though possibly with some hybrid characteristics – difficult to tell from the photo. See comments on the next page

Photo by Roger Hewitt



**Heath Spotted Orchid** 

*lan Cross*: There are some excellent displays of *Dactylorhiza* orchids in places across the heaths, Marl Pits Wood and Moreton Forest. They often involve 'hybrid swarms' of Southern Marsh, Heath Spotted and Common Spotted Orchids and, seemingly, everything in between, so can be very difficult to separate.

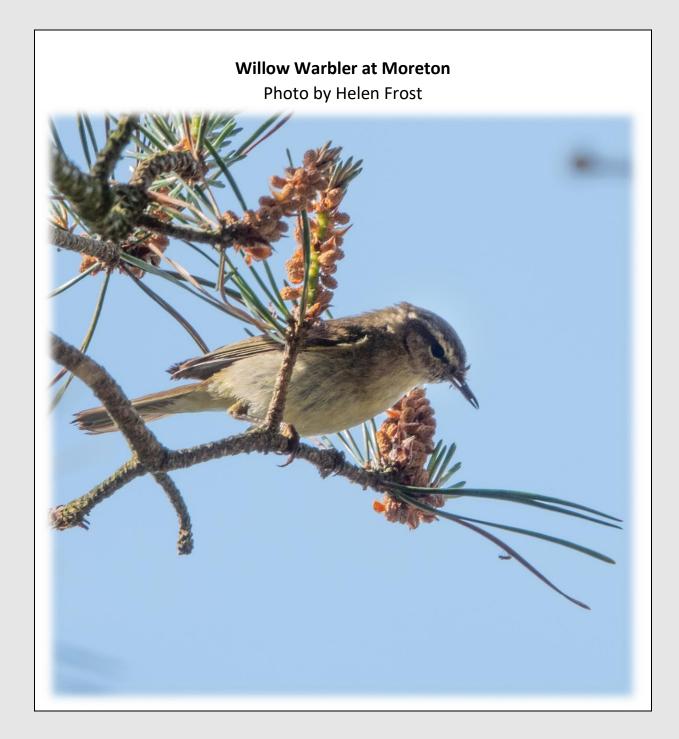
## **Mating Small Tortoiseshells?**

Photo and question sent in by Helen Frost

*Ian Cross*: Not quite mating but certainly in the early stages of courtship. The male (on the left) will tap the female's wings with his antennae. The cycle of pursuit, settling on the ground, tapping with antennae, then off on another chase will repeat many times before the butterflies seek a quiet place to mate.

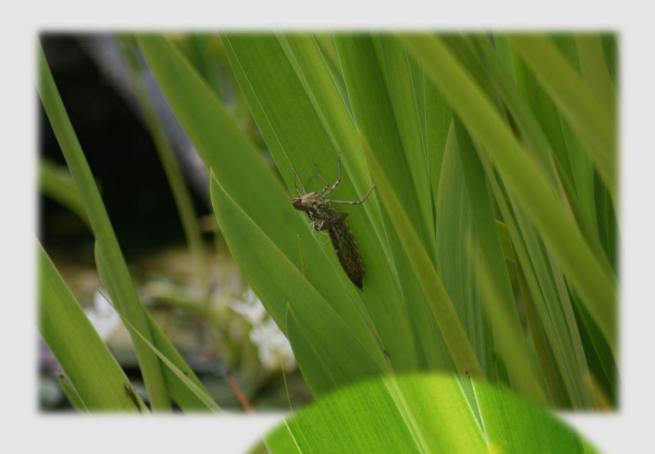


Courtship of Small Tortoiseshells
Photo by Helen Frost



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Exuvia (empty case) of Southern Hawker dragonfly Photos by Peter Bevis

Ian Cross: The cottonlike strands are the lining of the tracheae. Insects don't have lungs but rely on a network of fine tubes to deliver oxygen to every cell.

#### **Common Bistort in Throop**

Helen Frost: Also known as pudding dock, and apparently, particularly in Yorkshire, "Dock pudding" has traditionally been made with oatmeal, nettles, onions and fried with bacon around Easter.

*Ian Cross*: This is the only site in the parish. It seems to be remarkably persistent and has been known here for over 30 years. It even rated a mention in Recording Dorset 2 (an occasional publication of the Dorset Environmental Records Centre). It doesn't seem to have spread much (or contracted) in all that time but it would be great to hear of other sites locally.



Photo by Helen Frost

# **Garden at 16 Briantspuddle**

Photo by Rose Cheetham



#### In and out of the wet

Adrian Middleton: This shows the well-grown caterpillar of the Dark Tussock moth apparently heading off across a track to pupate. At the time it was raining heavily so caterpillar and photographer were well soaked, less so the camera, fortunately. The Dark Tussock favours heathland where it was found, contrasting with the Pale Tussock which is more regularly found in our gardens and often features in the Wildlife Newsletter.



Dark Tussock Photo by Adrian Middleton

The other photo (below) is the cast skin of a Southern Hawker dragonfly nymph from which the adult had recently emerged (June 5th), yet to develop its characteristic colours and still clinging on to the stem of an iris in the pond from where the nymph had recently crawled.

# **Exuvia and newly-emerged Southern Hawker Dragonfly**Photo by Adrian Middleton



# **Azure Damselfly**

Roger Hewitt: The Azure damselfly is one of the most common damselflies in our parish with hundreds on the wing at times, especially on the bigger ponds.



Photo by Roger Hewitt

*Ian Cross*: Azure Damselfly is **the** commonest blue damselfly in the parish. However, it's always worth a check. Hundreds of blue damselflies seen at a large pond or lake – especially if they are well out from the banks and in huge numbers over open water – are potentially Common Blue damselfly.

# **Butterfly Report: 6th June**

Roger Hewitt: a cloudy day with some sunshine, but windy again, It seems every day the wind gets up and there's a chill in the air when the sun goes in. I decided to walk across Throop and Turnerspuddle Heath in search of a few butterflies, and just a few it turned out to be.



Silver-studded Blue Photo by Roger Hewitt

My first Silver-studded Blue of the year and what a stunning little butterfly. No bigger than your thumb nail and as freshly hatched as you will find. I just love this little butterfly.

Next was two Small Heaths. The only other butterflies were two Painted Ladies. It will get better I hope. It's still a bit early for our summer butterflies.

Jay at Moreton Photo by Helen Frost



Sparrow and Great Spotted Woodpecker sharing feeder in Affpuddle
Photo by Helen Frost



#### **Heath Work**

Roger Hewitt: While walking across the heath with all the work that's gone on in recent weeks it does all look a little bit bleak, so I was glad to find these Rhododendron nicely out in flower. I know they are invasive, but a few left here and there to brighten up the whole area will not hurt.

*Ian Cross*: A tricky one this. The flowers are lovely but, alas, they **can** hurt as they act as a seed source for further invasions.



Rhododendron Photo by Roger Hewitt

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#### Echium pininana

Jane Courtier: If anybody wants to attract insects to their garden, they could do worse than give this towering plant a try. It is *Echium pininana*, or Giant Viper's Bugloss, and it makes stunning feature in the garden - this specimen is almost three metres tall - 9ft 4in.



Echium pininana Photo by Jane Courtier

These echiums can be grown from seed, making a rosette of leaves in their first year, and (usually) sending up the giant flower spikes in year two, though they can be a bit temperamental about flowering. Being biennial, the plants die once they have flowered, but they liberally scatter their seeds first and you should find plenty of seedlings to pot up and grow on for future years. Insects find the flowers irresistible, gathering both nectar and pollen as they move rapidly from bloom to bloom.

#### **Parish Heathland Wildlife**

Report and Photos by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: Of late I have also been heading off to catch up on some of the wildlife on our parish heathland. My first encounter was with an adult Smooth Snake. It soon made off but I had time to note the distinctive markings, comprising many bars interspersed with a few spots behind its head, along its neck and body. I was especially encouraged because it appeared to be one I had seen before, unaffected by recent forestry work not that far away.



Female adult Smooth Snake Photo by Adrian Middleton

My second sighting was a large adult Grass Snake, soon to moult the outer layers of its skin. Given this, its colouring was somewhat dowdy and its eyes were opaque (almost blue), both features a consequence of the build up of fluid between the old and new layers of the skin, including the scale over each eye: I noticed the pupils were just visible underneath these, as usual.



Adult Grass Snake – note the opaque blue eyes Photo by Adrian Middleton

I then saw a half-grown adder sloping off into some denser heather, adding to the other adders I have mentioned of late, in the same area, so clocking up our three native snakes. I felt this was all very promising. What followed was also interesting, given that I was shortly to see two Emperors of one kind or another.

With one or two blue butterflies flying around, I moved on. It was then that I spotted a rather small but very colourful creature on a small frond of heather (ling). It was the half-grown caterpillar of the Emperor moth. All being well it would eventually pupate later in the summer and finally hatch next spring into the adult, something I missed out on this year.



Emperor Moth Caterpillar Photo by Adrian Middleton

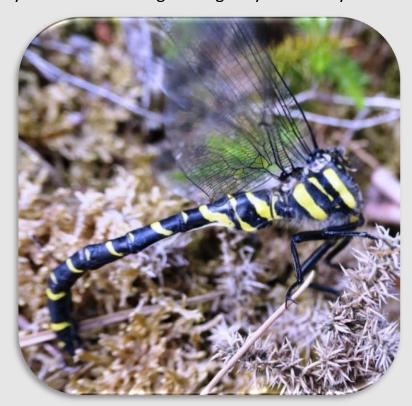
I continued my walk through heathers and gorse and it wasn't long before I saw a large dragonfly, wings glinting, whilst it appeared to be resting on the leaves of a small oak, reluctant to move. But there were two dragonflies in fact, not one, so I assumed they were mating.

I was wrong, this was not the case. The most obvious one proved to be a female Emperor Dragonfly feeding on the other. The one underneath bore no resemblance to it and when the Emperor finally flew off, the other was seen to be a part-eaten Golden-ringed Dragonfly, the unfortunate victim which had become prey.

I suppose this should not be particularly surprising, given the habits of these insects although these two large species are both quite similar in size, but with the odds favouring the Emperor.



Above: Female Emperor Dragonfly feeding on Golden-ringed Dragonfly Below: Partly-eaten Golden-ringed Dragonfly. Photos by Adrian Middleton



Back home I noticed there was a Large Red Damselfly by the pond, where of late there had been a Southern Hawker Dragonfly.

There were also a couple of voles in the Compost Hotel. Good numbers of bumblebees were also seen visiting various garden flowers. We all had had a busy and productive time!

Below: Large Red Damselfly Photo by Adrian Middleton



**ID Question**Photo submitted by Jane Courtier



Bumble bee with mites (and close-up, below) Photo by Jane Courtier



Jane Courtier: My photographs of insect visitors are rather blurred since they refused to pause in their work to have their pictures taken, but when I looked at the photos I was interested to see mites around the base of the wings on one bee. Am I right in thinking they are phoretic mites (*Parasitellus fucorum*)?

*Ian Cross*: From their size, colour and position these are indeed phoretic mites. A number of phoretic mites are associated with bumblebees. *Parasitellus fucorum* is one of the commoner and larger ones and of this quite bright, orangey-brown colour, so it probably is that species – though I can't really identify it from this photo.

'Phoresy', which is just the technical name for hitching a ride, is quite a common process in nature. Strictly, the hitch-hiking is only a temporary arrangement, allowing the flightless mite to get around. However, I have seen bumblebees absolutely heaving with hundreds of mites.

**ID please!**Photo submitted by Jane Courtier



*Ian Cross:* The insect above is another bumblebee. Either the Common Carder Bee or the Tree Bumblebee. The thorax is normally of a gingery colour pretty much all over but all castes of both species can develop these dark, often quite square, patches. The male Tree Bumblebee is especially prone to this. A clear view of the tip of the tail is helpful in separating them.

#### **Poo ID**

What kind of poo at 16 Briantspuddle? Photo submitted by Rose Cheetham



*Ian Cross:* Black and shiny, looks like fox poo. It's usually longer and more cylindrical than this and tapered at one end but I think that this has coiled over itself a bit.

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor, Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website Margaret Cheetham, Editor

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Simon Eames: I have just seen what for me was an extraordinary and initially rather eerie nocturnal vision. On my usual midnight dog walk to Gully Lane and back, ahead of me I could see an incredibly bright vivid green point of light shining very clearly in the verge from several metres distance. Unfortunately I don't have the professional kit nor skills of your regular contributors so these phone shots aren't good, but hopefully will be sufficient for identification. I'm guessing a glow-worm of some sort, but I had no idea anything so tiny could project such intensity of light!



Glow-worm Photos by Simon Eames





Glow-worm Photos by Simon Eames



*Ian Cross*: Lovely photos. Whilst glow-worms remain relatively widespread across the parish – we have had records from as far north as Piddle wood – the general impression is that their numbers are gradually declining. It's certainly unusual to see more than the odd one or two these days.

It is, of course, only the female that glows. She is wingless and uses the light to draw in the males which are fully winged and capable of flight. They are always a welcome sight and feature regularly in the newsletter: as glowing adults or as larvae - which are relatively easy to find by day if you don't fancy a night-time stroll (see newsletter 2021, number 92).

**Shasta\* Daisies at 16 Briantspuddle** Photo by Sarah Bunnell



**Canada Geese**Photo by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: Canada Geese have bred again, always make a nice photo. Not sure what the Egyptian Geese have done. They were in the field behind my house for ages but I cannot see the whole field, so will have to wait and see if we get any goslings wandering around.

A nice week of warm and sunny weather has helped the first summer butterflies to come out. It's always good when you see the first Marbled White on the wing. I counted 27 near Kite Hill on the 15 June and also my first Large Skipper and Small Skipper. Meadow Browns are doing well – I counted 84 here. I have only seen five Small Tortoiseshells and three Painted Ladies. Peak time for here is mid-July, so I hope for more next time.

The Beautiful Demoiselle, once a bit scarce in our parish, seems to be more common in recent years. This one is an immature or teneral male, as its wings are dark brown in its first week or two and when it gets to be adult its wings will turn much darker - sort of blackish with a tint of blue. It stays in wooded areas until it becomes fully mature and it will then fly to the nearest river ready

for breeding. We need a bit of rain as most of our small ponds on Erica Trust Land have dried up now, and the two large ponds are about half full.

Beautiful Demoiselle Photo by Roger Hewitt



Marbled White Photo by Roger Hewitt



#### **Lilac Beauty**

Adrian Middleton: In the wildlife newsletter three or four years ago, there were discussions about moths with folds in their wings when at rest. At about this time I mentioned the Lilac Beauty. This attractive moth has a pleat in each forewing when a rest. I said I would look out for it, one of my favourites. Anyway I've waited about seven years since seeing the last one, so here is a photo of the one I spotted in the garden this week



Lilac Beauty Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### **Eyed Hawkmoth**

Adrian Middleton: Although this is a reasonably common one, the moth's eyes are striking and are thought to be a warning sign. More significantly this morning's moth put on a real threatening display, posturing and revealing the

whole underwings just very briefly before returning to a more normal display position, still showing the eyes. Hopefully the photo shows this.

## Eyed Hawkmoth in full threatening display on cherry tree Photo by Adrian Middleton



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/37 27 June 2022



The River Piddle Photo by Sarah Bunnell

#### **ID Question and photo submitted by Sue Taylor**

Sue Taylor: I had these visitors to the garden a couple of days ago. Not a very good photo I'm afraid. Are they Egyptian Geese?

*Ian Cross*: Confirmed! Yes, these are Egyptian Geese and Goslings.



#### **Village Hall Swift Box Update**

Tasie Russell: Until recently 12 Swifts were the largest number seen locally. Yesterday I had an extra pair of eyes in my garden, and we saw a tight group of at least 30 Swifts mid-morning, flying very high up above the village hall. There was some increase in activity around the nest boxes on the Village Hall and over my garden a few doors to the east. We unblocked one of my boxes and some interest was shown, but none seen to enter the box. Numbers have now returned to normal. I continue to live in hope as the possible Des Res is still available - although a pair of House Sparrows are showing an interest!

#### Thank you to Everyone!

We were surprised to get back from Portugal and find this certificate waiting for us. It refers to the Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter, which of course is everyone who reads the newsletter and contributes to it. Thank you everyone!



#### **Cinnabar Moth**

Adrian Middleton: This morning I found a Cinnabar moth in the garden, amongst others. It is difficult to believe the Cinnabar is also of some BAP concern, once very common but now in declining numbers, largely because the caterpillar's favourite food, ragwort is less in evidence: another favoured plant eaten is groundsel – there will soon be a few more in my garden than there have been.



Cinnabar Moth Photo by Adrian Middleton

### **Roe Deer at Briantspuddle**

Photos by Helen Frost



Helen Frost: I spotted this roe deer right by the fence near the stile at Briantspuddle meadows!



#### **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: I found this Golden-ringed Dragonfly near Culpeppers car park, possibly still drying its wings or just resting.



#### **Cygnet Updates** by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: Our local pair of swans have two cygnets. The photo was taken from the main bridge at Briantspuddle looking west on 22 June.







Parish path Photo by Sarah Bunnell

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/38 28 June 2022



Blackbirds in the garden Photo by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: Before the end of the recent very warm spell this June a family of Blackbirds were seen basking on a favoured patch of a somewhat parched lawn; the two shown looked like a couple of well- spaced-out siblings.

#### **Corrections!**

Sue Taylor sent the photo for ID and we said they were Egyptian Geese. Jamie was the first to correct us:

Jamie McMillan: The geese in the photo by Sue Taylor are Greylags. They are of the same status as Canada Geese and Egyptian Geese in Dorset - 'feral', meaning descended from introduced stock. I think the main centre of these is Poole Park, and they have spread from there.



Above: photo sent in by Sue Taylor Below: Egyptian Geese Photo by Jamie McMillan



Jamie McMillan: I have seen Egyptian Geese flying along the river from the garden, but never settled in the parish - Roger Hewitt may have seen them possibly on the pond. Egyptian Geese are hyper-distinctive both as adults & goslings - nearer Shelducks than anything. In flight they have very striking white wing panels, unlike any other geese we might see. They are well- named, being quite common in Egypt, more in the south than north.

Many thanks also to Roger Hewitt for pointing this out. Roger also spotted another error. The photo below is a Silver-studded Blue.



Silver-studded Blue Photo by Helen Frost

#### Feedback on Tasie's Swift comments (Newsletter 37)

Barry Shephard: We are the grateful recipients of Briantspuddle wildlife newsletter, even though we live in Wool. I have been providing support for our little colony of swifts here in Wool for some years. I don't know whether your swift boxes are intended to expand an existing colony or to establish a new

one, but the organisation below will put you in touch with a wealth of help and information, if indeed you don't already have it.

The current thoughts are that swifts are encouraged to explore new nest sites when they first arrive in the locality. It is likely that prospecting birds are youngsters on their first, or second return to these shores ie birds that are yet to establish a home. The birds are greatly encouraged to visit and occupy new sites if swift calls are played close by the nest boxes when the birds are first seen in the area. I have a CD produced by swift-conservation.org which you are welcome to borrow, although I think it is also now available as an mp3.

Hope this might be of some help.

https://swift-conservation.org/

Marbled White at Moreton
Photo by Helen Frost



## Walking around the Parish

Photos by Sarah Bunnell









### **Hummingbird Hawkmoth**

Photo by Adrian Middleton



Adrian Middleton: a very lively Hummingbird Hawkmoth, nectaring on Valerian (a great favourite) on the roadside in Affpuddle - my second for the year. Taken on 26 June.

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/39 1 July 2022



Roger Hewitt: while I have been laid up with Lyme disease I've been watching a lot of young birds coming to the nut feeder including this young Great Spotted Woodpecker, but trying to keep the squirrel off the nuts is hopeless - he has just made himself at home.



At the bird feeder – photos by Roger Hewitt



Hare at Moreton Photo by Helen Frost



Turnerspuddle Church entrance Photo by Sarah Bunnell

Audrey Grindrod: My first hedgehog for three years came last night (28 June) and had a feast. I am so glad.

#### Spotted Longhorn Rutpela maculata

Adrian Middleton: Before the weekend on July 1st, a somewhat sunny but blustery day, I headed off to some local heathland in search of my usual quarry – reptiles. But there was nothing to be seen on this occasion. There were one or two ravens, stonechats and chiffchaffs calling and some dragonflies flying up and down the main track. Approaching the end of my trail hoping for something different I turned onto a small track hemmed in by undergrowth, when I saw a wasp on a flower right at the back of a large prickly bramble bush. Grasping the nettle, so to speak, I pressed forward with a view to taking a photograph, stretching out to hold steady the thorny stem bearing the appropriate flower and pollen-feeding insect. But things were not quite as I had thought. The yellow and black "wasp" seemed somewhat clumsy and its wing cases (elytra) gave the game away. It was in fact the relatively common Spotted Longhorn Rutpela maculata, one of the Longhorns which mimic wasps! A photograph was possible before the obliging insect flew off and I could make for home.



Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### The suffocating web - Dodder

*Ian Cross*: Strolling across a heathland track you may have come across a clump of heather, buried under a mat of slender, red threads and tiny, white or pale pink 'powder-puff' flowers (picture 1). This sinister-looking plant is Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*).



Picture 1: The Bell Heather is barely visible under a mass of red threads

Photo by Ian Cross

It's a parasitic plant that doesn't bother with photosynthesis but gets all its nutrients from its host — usually heather in this particular species. In a scene straight out of "Invasion of the Body Snatchers", the red threads twist and turn, seeking out stems of the host plant. They then attach themselves (picture 2) and penetrate the host tissues to extract the 'life blood'.



Picture 2: A Bell Heather shoot and attached Dodder stems
Photo by Ian Cross

I'm often reminded more of "Gulliver's Travels" when I take a close look at what's going on. Like Gulliver and the Lilliputians, the mat of scarlet ropes almost seems to be strapping the heather down (picture 3). They don't work like that, of course, but I can never resist the comparison.

Though very small, the flowers themselves are actually quite attractive (picture 3). Occasionally you find Dodder growing in such abundance that the massed, pink powder-puffs fill the air with a rich, honey scent. When this happens they are irresistible to insects, and can be a good place to find rare heathland wasps.



Picture 3 Close-up, the Dodder flowers are quite attractive
Photo by Ian Cross

#### Where to See Dodder

This is not a rare plant but, by its very nature, tends to be sporadic and unpredictable in its appearance. It seems to like heather plants that are sprouting thick, fresh young growth. For this reason you often see Dodder where the heather has been cut – mown fire breaks are a great place to look for it.

In our parish, the recently-cleared areas of Erica Trust Heath are currently sporting some particularly fine clumps of Dodder. It's where I took these pictures, so now is as good a time as any to find it.

#### **ID Questions**

#### **Grasshopper submitted by Helen Frost**

Helen Frost: I would say a common field grasshopper but Ian will know!



*Ian Cross*: Yes, a male. Now usually just called Field Grasshopper (*Chorthippus brunneus*).





Ian Cross: A Snipefly, Rhagionidae. Almost certainly Rhagio tringarius the Marsh Snipefly (based on rarity of alternative candidate). The other potential Rhagio that looks like this (of the 6 UK species) is Rhagio annulatus the Wood Snipefly. Which can be distinguished by black – not yellow – humeri and palps. I can't really distinguish these features from your photo.

I'm never comfortable dismissing possibilities based on rarity – that way you never learn the critical identification features or what the rarities look like, as you always get stuck with assuming it's the common one. However, I would be surprised if this was anything other than *tringarius*.

Julian responds: The palps are yellow, so tringarius!



**Dragonfly submitted by Helen Frost** 

Ian Cross: Male Four-spotted Chaser (Libellula quadrimaculata)

#### **Bird Updates**



Roger Hewitt: Our Barn Owl is working night and day just now, hope fledging of chicks not too far off. Photo by Roger Hewitt



Yellowhammer with beakful! Photo by Helen Frost

#### **Moths and Butterflies**





Magpie Moth and Pine Hawkmoth Photos by Adrian Middleton

Ringlet butterfly with open and closed wings Photos by Helen Frost





Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/40 3 July 2022



Mystery larva submitted by Chrissie Garfield – see back page for answer



#### Focus on - The Ringlet

Ian Cross: The Ringlet must be one of our most overlooked butterflies. I suspect that much of the time it is dismissed as "just another Meadow Brown" and doesn't merit a second glance. Unlike that butterfly it has none of the tawny-orange tones but is simply dark brown above (picture below).



The Ringlet upperside Photo by Ian Cross

However, there is nothing quite as lovely as an absolutely fresh Ringlet. To me it is just a slab of the deepest, darkest, richest dark chocolate – so dark and velvety it is almost black. Unfortunately, this velvety-blackness rapidly fades and it does, indeed, just become brown.

It's the underside that earns this butterfly its name. The 'ringlets' are a series of golden circles, each filled with black and with a tiny white dot at the centre (picture below).



The Ringlet underside Photo by Ian Cross

Every now and then you come across a peculiar form of the Ringlet called *arete*, in which the golden rings and the black infill are totally missing, just leaving the tiny white dots. This has a weird effect, leaving the butterfly looking slightly bereft without its signature gold ringlets. It's not a common variety but not particularly rare either. Locally, I have seen *arete* in the woods around Bloxworth but not, so far, in our parish.

An unusual feature of the Ringlet is that it actually prefers cool, wet summers. Their numbers suffered after the long, hot summer of 1976 – though they rapidly recovered when 'normal service resumed' in the cold, damp years that followed.

This is very much the butterfly of the moment. For some reason Ringlets are doing particularly well this year and I am seeing them everywhere. Along grassy rides in shady woods and mature hedgerows they are even exceeding the Meadow Brown in abundance. It's only in open, sunny grassland that the Meadow Brown comes to the fore.

How does this fit the usual pattern? Due to a brief hot spell the countryside generally looks rather drier than usual, with many ponds dried up. On the other hand cool and cloudy conditions have reasserted themselves so conditions seem more typical of a good Ringlet year.



### Roger's Wildlife Pond (Briantspuddle)



Wildlife Pond Photos by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: Everyone should have a wildlife pond in their garden, not just as a focal point but for the wildlife. Our pond is only 2 metres square and has done well this year. Christine has been up early counting the Southern Hawkers as they hatch out; she has counted up to 22 up to now and still a few late ones coming out.

We also have some Common Newts and do see some young ones at times so they must like it here. The pond did have Goldfish but when the last one died we decided to fill it in a bit and have a sort of bog pond, but left one part of it a bit deeper for frogs. We kept our nice little mini water lily, and seems to work well.

#### Addendum (2<sup>nd</sup> July) ...

I looked at our pond this morning and noticed a Common Darter had just hatched out, a new one for us in our pond.



Common Darter Photo by Roger Hewitt

# **Squirrel at Moreton**Photo by Helen Frost



Grey Squirrel Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: We are so blessed with woodland where we live but I always feel it is such a shame we don't have red squirrels here. I'm not really a fan of the greys but had to snap this one enjoying a meal at Moreton

#### **Raft Spiders on Erica Trust land**

*Ian Cross*: I had a chance to visit the Western Ponds complex today (29 June). A pleasant surprise was to see how strongly the Raft Spiders are breeding. In one small area, just 30cm in diameter, there were three females with cocoons (see below) and one female guarding a cluster of spiderlings. Furthermore, juvenile Raft Spiders of a range of sizes were scattered on the vegetation all around.

So, all in all, a very established colony.



Raft Spider Photo by Ian Cross

#### **Mystery Creature (see front page)**

Chrissie Garside: I've just found this interesting creature in the turf I'm lifting, not in any of my reference books? It was in some very old grass I'm moving to make a wildflower patch! All I could come up with was cockchafer!

*Ian Cross*: Correct. It's a cockchafer larva – photo of the adult beetle below.



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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/41 11 July 2022



#### **Murder and Mayhem on Erica Trust Heath**

*Ian Cross:* The Erica Trust Heath reserve is maturing nicely and is steadily building up an enviable list of wildlife from all groups. One of the most dynamic among these are the Bees and Wasps and it seems that every day sees new additions to the species list.

Time spent focussing closely on these is amply rewarded and I recommend a 'hands and knees' approach whenever you get the chance. Detailed observation reveals the comings and goings – among the solitary wasps especially – to have all the death, sex and betrayal of an entire box set of 'Game of Thrones'.

Take the story of two wasps, which have both only been added to the Erica Trust species list in the past week or so. These are the Sand Tailed Digger Wasp (*Cerceris arenaria*) and its special parasite *Hedychrum nobile*. The latter one is relatively recently added to the British list and yet to have a common name coined for it.



1 Female Sand Tailed Digger Wasp with weevil prey. Photo by Ian Cross.

The Sand Tailed Digger Wasp is a predator of weevils (picture 1) which are paralysed and brought back to the nest as food for the developing larva. As she leaves her nest burrow, having just delivered a weevil, she pauses near the entrance, her little black and yellow mask of a face just visible (picture 2) as she checks it is safe to depart before cautiously emerging (picture 3).



2 The female Sand Tailed Digger Wasp pauses at the nest entrance before coming out. Photo by Ian Cross

The digger wasp's greatest enemy is a cuckoo wasp called *Hedychrum nobile*. These are stunning insects clad in a heavy armour of emerald green and ruby red (picture 4 and front cover). This species is a relative newcomer to the UK and only appeared in Dorset in 2016. This is the first time it has been recorded on the Erica Trust Heath.



3 Then cautiously emerges. Photo by Ian Cross.



4 Her main enemy *Hedychrum nobile* watches from a nearby viewpoint.

Photo by Ian Cross

Hedychrum nobile is a parasite of the Sand Tailed Digger Wasp and no other species. The cuckoo wasp is not interested in the baby digger but in its store of weevils. The cuckoo lays an egg on the weevil store when the rightful nest owner is away hunting. On hatching, her larva first seeks out the baby digger wasp and ruthlessly kills it before settling down to feast on the stock of weevils. You might feel a little less sympathy for the baby digger wasp when you remember that the weevils are not dead but only paralysed. This is so they remain fresh without rotting but does mean that they are gradually eaten alive – all pretty gruesome.



5 She waits for the digger wasp to fly off before slipping into the nest.

Photo by Ian Cross

Just like the bird of the same name, the cuckoo wasp closely monitors the nest and even nips in for a quick inspection from time to time (picture 5). She aims to lay an egg in a nest cell when it is fully stocked and not a moment before. Should they bump into the rightful owner – which happens occasionally –

cuckoo wasps roll themselves into a tight ball and rely on their dimpled armour to deflect the digger wasp's stings.

All this can be seen within inches of the edges of the tracks that cross Erica Trust Heath. And all these astonishing insects have colonised since the clearance of the conifers. With all this death, deceit and gory endings who needs television?

Lesley Haskins: Since 7 July **Erica Trust land** has 6 cattle - 3 adults and 3 youngsters.

Don't forget what a wonderful spot the heathstones, just past the timber stack area, are for sitting on and watching nightjars - and the sunset.





#### The moth which had lost its crown

Adrian Middleton: Two weeks ago a decidedly black moth turned up in my garden in Affpuddle. Looking at it more closely the wings, more obvious on the photograph, I noticed it appeared rather surprisingly as an impressive mix of green and purple-brown patches. I had never seen anything quite like this before. It became a case of a thorough search of my moth ID book pictures and descriptive text and a good few hours of laborious reading for a likely candidate. Eventually I admitted defeat and asked Hamish Murray, well known conservationist, for his help. I received an unbelievably quick reply that this was the "green form" of the Coronet moth. Now as the moth's name suggests it usually has a distinctive image of a whitish coronet on the forewings. But my Coronet had absolutely none — it was a Coronet moth which had lost its crown! No wonder I couldn't find it



"Green Form" of the Coronet Moth Photo by Adrian Middleton

*Ian Cross*: Yes, this is the form known as *coronula* in which the 'coronet' is reduced to a few spots, or is totally absent as in this one. Tasie sent me one to identify about ten years ago now, which perhaps gives an idea of its frequency in the parish.

#### The more usual markings....

Adrian Middleton: Waring and Townsend's Field Guide to Moths of Great Britain and Ireland (2003) mentions the normal white marbling on the moth's thorax and forewings and the different variations. On each forewing the several white markings (outwards of the small white circular edge to the "kidney" mark which are also apparent) are said to resemble a crown. The additional photo of another Coronet moth taken later shows the more usual markings and came as an opportune reminder about these variations!



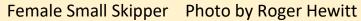
Coronet Moth Photo by Adrian Middleton



Raft Spider in Bladen
Valley garden pond
Photo by
Graham Lightfoot

#### **Butterfly Updates**

Roger Hewitt: As I have felt better, I have done a couple of butterfly walks and I'm glad to say a few of our summer butterflies are now starting to come out in small numbers - Large and Small Skippers, Silver-washed Fritillary, Ringlet and an early Grayling and Gatekeeper.





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#### **Purple Hairstreak**



Photo 1 – Male Purple Hairstreak Photo by Roger Hewitt



Photo 2 Female Purple Hairstreak Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: This beautiful butterfly is surprisingly widespread and often quite numerous, but can be hard to see because they spend most of their time at the top of oak trees. The male is a splendid purple colour edged with black on its upper wings and a silvery grey underside (photo 1), the female has dark brown upper wings with just a flash of purple with underside very similar (photo 2). They do bask in the sunshine with their wings wide open on

occasions and sometimes come down low in the early mornings, then return back up to the top of the trees. I have seen the male basking but for some reason never got a photo. Best time to look for them is late afternoon early evening on bright sunny days, like now. The two in the photo were seen on 9<sup>th</sup> July.





#### 21 Today

*Ian Cross*: Congratulations to Erica Trust Heath, which today (14<sup>th</sup> July) achieved the milestone of twenty-one – species of dragonfly that is!

The twentieth species turned up earlier this year when Roger Hewitt found Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*) more or less in the time and place predicted in the last Erica Trust dragonfly report. It's always satisfying when a prediction is fulfilled – nice one Roger!

The twenty-first was due to the finding of a mature female Black-tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*), see picture 1. The arrival of this species was also forecast in the report and it was probably a safer bet that it would show up sooner or later.



Photo 1: Black-tailed Skimmer mature female – the first record for Erica Trust Heath

Photo by Ian Cross

However, the circumstances of its visit weren't exactly as I thought they might be. Black-tailed Skimmers are pioneer species that prefer recently-created waterbodies with plenty of bare ground for basking. They often disappear as a pool matures and becomes choked with aquatic vegetation. I expected a visit to one of the recently-excavated pools with its surrounds of bare sand and gravel.

The Erica Trust reserve isn't suitable for Black-tailed Skimmers to breed at the moment as all the newly created scrapes – the most likely habitat – have dried up. This female was hunting in a sheltered, hot clearing on the newly-cleared heath.

So, the 21<sup>st</sup> for the reserve, but not as a breeding species.

Twenty-one species of dragonfly is an enviable total for any nature reserve – especially one that isn't particularly focussed on a wetland habitat.

I love the story behind animal and plant names. The specific name of the Black-tailed Skimmer is 'cancellatum' which means 'latticed'. This used to be a bit of a puzzle to me. Was it due to the network of veins in the wings? But that didn't make sense, as all dragonflies have wings like that.

The mystery lasted until I first encountered a freshly emerged male, which had yet to acquire his mature blue colouring. The teneral male (picture 2) looks absolutely nothing like the dragonfly he will become – when he eventually develops his powder-blue body and black tail (picture 3).

Instead, you see a vivid, mustard-yellow dragonfly with strong black markings, running both along the abdomen and across it. This then, is the lattice of its name.



Photo 2: Black-tailed Skimmer teneral male. This shows the strong 'lattice' of black marks on the abdomen that gives this species its Latin name. Photo by Ian Cross.



Photo 3: Black-tailed Skimmer the fully mature male looks nothing like his younger self
Photo by Ian Cross

#### Peter Bevis' Garden Pond

If you look closely you'll see that all-important slope that allows wildlife to escape from the pond – hedgehogs, frogs/toads (also at risk of drowning if they can't get out) and anything else that might have wandered/fallen in.





#### Wild Woodbury by Roger Hewitt

#### Introduction

I expect most people have heard of the re-wilding project called Wild Woodbury in our neighbouring parish of Bere Regis. The Dorset Wildlife Trust bought the now unused Court Farm, consisting of 420 acres, with the mission of returning it to nature. I took the opportunity to go on one of the guided walks led by project manager Seb Haggett. We started by the Court Farm buildings, and he explained that some re-development of the main building may take place perhaps even bringing the main headquarters here, but that's sometime in the future.

#### Walking down Frome Lane

The fields on either side of the lane will be left to re-wild, but in the field close to Court Farm they will create a picnic area. The re-wilding areas will be shaped by whatever bushes and trees grow. They will dictate what work needs to be done.

420 acres is hard to imagine, but it is a big area from Court Farm right across to Lower Woodbury Farm and the fields along the road to Snatford Bridge. They will be carrying out some drainage work on the Lower Woodbury fields, digging some new ditches and blocking others to re-direct the water flow to areas they wish to turn into wet meadow areas. This is in the hope of getting back some wading birds such as Lapwings for example.

Back in the 1950s this area had lots of Lapwings: I used to walk this area when birding as a schoolboy. There is also a field called Peewit Field – there used to be hundreds there.

What have we done to our wildlife?

On a brighter note Seb has done a small amount of ringing and caught some Woodcock, Jack Snipe and Common Snipe, so all is not lost. Woodlark have already arrived in the field near Court Farm. In time they will be

introducing ponies, some old breed pigs (not wild boar) and some old breed of cattle to graze over the whole area. They are not certain which breeds yet.

The whole area is not open to the public at the moment, but there is a footpath that can be walked in some parts. But if you would like to look over the area, go on a guided walk as I did, and Seb will tell you all you need to know.

#### For more information, here is the link:

https://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/wildlife-conservation/wild-woodbury?gclid=CjwKCAjwt7SWBhAnEiwAx8ZLavz3zeOJs8rO1BkxGqy6t49AsNcfl-D6pyV9KcXDiU-t02NMPUcLthoCaqIQAvD BwE

Or just do a search for "Wild Woodbury"



From Dorset Wildlife Trust website, showing Court Farm in the foreground.

# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/43 16 July 2022

Red Kite Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: Someone asked if there were any Red Kites about. Well this one flew over my house on 14<sup>th</sup> July at 1pm. By the time I found my camera it had drifted away, so a little bit distant but okay.

#### Nightjar nesting

*lan Cross:* We are fortunate in our parish to have good populations of nesting Nightjars. Usually, our closest and most memorable encounters with these mysterious birds are on balmy, summer's evenings, when we can tune into their unearthly churring song, hear the characteristic wing-clapping, or, if we are really lucky, catch a glimpse of a silhouette as a bird wheels overhead against an evening sky.

I used to lead Nightjar walks in my countryside ranger days and there are many ways of enhancing these evening experiences. Try the old trick of flicking a white handkerchief. This can draw in a close fly-past by a territorial male, who

thinks that the flash of white is the white wing patch of a rival male. This does actually work. Though the key is to give it a quick flick, not jump up and down, waving it frantically around as if you were auditioning for a part in the Railway Children!

Much rarer are those daytime encounters when you put up a nightjar on a heathland walk. Usually the bird quickly vanishes but, if it is sitting on eggs, you may witness another aspect of their bizarre behaviour.

Nightjars build no nest but simply deposit their eggs — usually two — on bare ground. This makes them particularly vulnerable as you can imagine. On taking off an incubating bird may feign injury, with short 'hopping' flights and wings drooping as if they were broken. The idea of this is that it will distract a predator who thinks it has stumbled on an easy meal. Occasionally the bird will settle on the ground in front of you (see picture) inviting you to pursue it. All the time, though, it is carefully drawing you away from the nest.



Female Nightjar feigning injury, sitting on the ground and inviting pursuit.

Photo by Ian Cross

So, what to do? The most important thing is to leave the area as quickly as possible. Whatever you do, don't go looking for the eggs. They're well camouflaged and you probably won't see the eggs until you trample them. Instead, retrace your steps carefully and precisely, scanning the ground as you go.

If in doubt you could try following the bird. At least you know that she will be trying to lead you away from the nest.

A close encounter of this kind really drives home the message of just how vulnerable ground-nesting birds are. Any dog criss-crossing through heather or grass will flush a sitting bird. You may think, "Ah, no harm done, it's got away". However, eggs are exposed to predators, incubating birds stressed and the nest and contents may be trampled.

Always keep any dog, no matter how well-behaved, on a lead in areas where there are likely to be ground-nesting birds. Nests can be perilously close to footpaths and the damage can be done even if the dog doesn't stray.

#### A micro-moth from SE Asia

Adrian Middleton: Moths seem to dominate my deliberations at the moment, once again causing me something of a challenge. I found this moth in the garden, looking like a comparatively large micro-moth (36mm across the wings). Unfortunately after a diligent search in a well-known tome about micro-moths full of pictures, my mind boggling, I found nothing.

On seeing my photo, Hamish Murray once again kindly responded very quickly, having identified it as the Box-tree Moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*) an accidental introduction from SE Asia first seen in Kent in 2007. In the event I looked through the book again (400 pages) and found a couple of lines of small print about it but no photo). Over 1500 micro-moths have been recorded in GB and Ireland – I had tried!

The moth concerned was very flighty but the photo of it at rest shows it in a

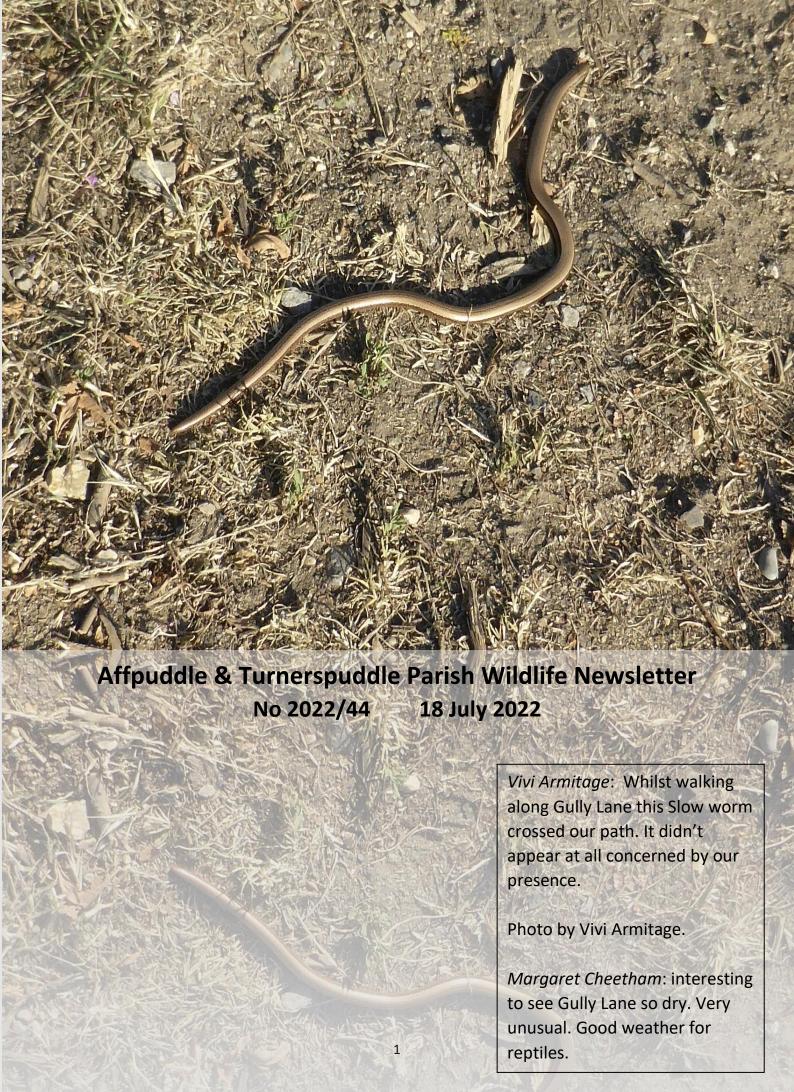
good light, a striking mix of black edging with a purplish wash. In fact very attractive but the caterpillars can sometimes completely destroy the foliage on a box bush, something of a problem.



Box-tree Moth Photo by Adrian Middleton

A moth which creates mixed feelings.

https://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/box-tree-moth



#### ID Questions submitted by Damien Lewis, Vivi Armitage and Helen Frost

In the garden at the Hollow (Damien Lewis)

Damien Lewis: My son was struck by this amazing plant in our garden, hence the photo. He'd love to know more - what it is and what it's up to??!! It looks like the proverbial triffid!



*Ian Cross*: This is a Houseleek, a succulent in the family Crassulaceae. I'm not well-versed in the full range of available garden plants but I suspect something close to *Sempervivum tectorum*.

The muscular, menacing look is due to the fleshy leaves, an adaptation to dry, hot conditions – it must be loving the weather at the moment!

On lavender in Throop (Vivi Armitage) Ian Cross: Two Small Skippers









#### On Brian May's land (Helen Frost)

Helen Frost: I know this is just outside the parish but I have been unable to ID this butterfly seen yesterday. I dare say it is something ordinary but thought lan might like to see it just in case!



lan Cross: An unusually poorly-marked male Brown Argus, identification not helped by being very worn and faded — I can see why you struggled. See photo 1 below of a more normally-marked male. It's a male as the orange-red crescents on the forewing peter out towards the leading edge of the wing — the part entomologists would call the costa. Females are more strongly marked with a more complete row of broader spots (photo 2 below). The all-brown form of the female Common Blue can also look like Helen's butterfly but it is unusual for them to be totally devoid of any trace of blue. Also, they tend to have white scales just outside of the orange crescents on the hind wing.



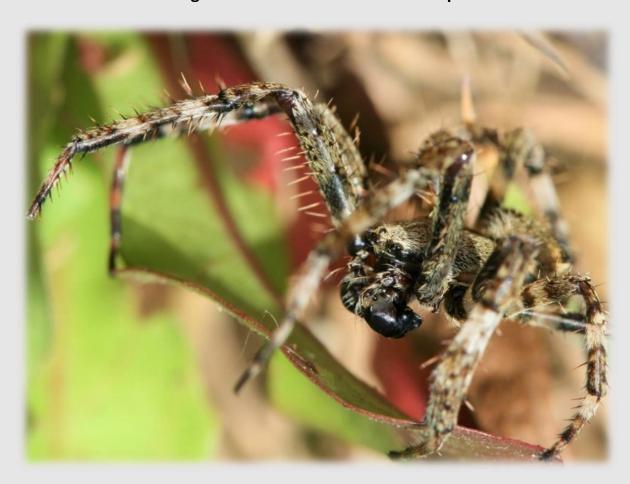


Photo 1 Male Brown Argus

Photo 2 Female Brown Argus

Note how the red crescents on the forewing of the male diminish and 'peter out' before reaching the costa. Whilst the female has strong red spots right up to the leading edge — photos by Ian Cross

#### Angular Orbweaver – a narrow escape



Male Angular Orbweaver having just had a narrow escape
Photo by Ian Cross

This is a male of the Angular Orbweaver (*Araneus angulatus*). Apparently it was saved just in time – being destined for Ali Peck's porridge while she was enjoying her al fresco breakfast.

Which is perhaps just as well. I don't have any experience of how it works as a porridge flavouring – we prefer yoghurt and brown sugar in our household – but I do know that this is a Nationally Scarce species, so it would have been a tragic waste.

It's actually a close relative of the very common Garden Cross Spider but differs in having two little triangular tubercles on the 'abdomen' (one of which is marked by an arrow in the second picture).



The arrow shows the characteristic tubercle.

Photo by Ian Cross.

# Not much of a looker! Young Dunnock in our Affpuddle garden Photo by Helen Frost





Photo by Audrey Grindrod

#### The Bug Hotel at Bladentye

Audrey Grindrod: This bug house is now packed with wood dust. Why is it like this in July? Most of the year the tubes are empty. The large tube is still empty, which insect would use this one?

lan Cross: Congratulations - you seem to have a pretty full complement of occupied nests! Most of the holes are full of completed nests, which have now been sealed and capped-off. The bees in these will emerge next year. The caps will be made of mud or chewed vegetation fragments, depending on the species of bee or wasp that made them. You can see one nest in the dead centre of the log which has a jagged hole in the cap. This is where the occupant has emerged, so this is one of last year's nests which has not yet been cleared out and re-used (and may not be now).

The large diameter cane just left of centre may be just a little too big for the species of bee that has occupied the other holes. It might suit a larger bee, like some of the leafcutters (*Megachile* sp.), six species of which have been recorded in the parish.

### A Helpful Comma

Vivi Armitage: We went on a butterfly search and this Comma helped with photo opportunities as it settled

on our clothes!

Comma on clothes
Photo by Vivi Armitage



#### Is this our most beautiful dragonfly?

*Ian Cross*: The Four-spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*) is on the wing at the moment and can be one of the most prominent dragonflies at heathland pools in the parish.



Four-spotted Chaser – a standard female Photo by Ian Cross

An unusual feature of this dragonfly is that there is virtually no difference at all in the colour scheme between males and females. Now, most British dragonflies have at least a degree of what is called 'sexual dimorphism' (the fancy expression for the males and females looking different). However, in the Four-spotted Chaser the contrasts are very subtle - probably the best way to distinguish them in the field is by behaviour.

Telling the sexes apart, would perhaps, make an article for another time as what I'm interested in today is the spots on the wings that give this species its name.

The picture above shows a fairly fresh but, otherwise, standard female. The first thing that strikes you is that there are two spots on each wing, which makes four on each side. Hang on, that makes eight in total. No-one has ever been able to explain to me why this is the Four-spotted and not the Eight-spotted Chaser. In fact, if you count the triangular, black patches at the base of each hindwing, you could argue that it should be the Ten-spotted Chaser! Who said dragonfly names are always logical.

There is a fairly frequent form in which the spots are expanded from neat little rectangles into broad, smudgy clouds as in the picture below. This variety is called 'praenubila' which, in Latin, means 'very cloudy', which I think sums it up pretty accurately.

This is my candidate for our most beautiful dragonfly. Take another look at the picture below and see if you agree. Or maybe you have your own favourite?



Four-spotted Chaser – female form *praenubila* Photo by Ian Cross



Greater Birds-foot Trefoil at Moreton – about 2 feet high!

Photo by Helen Frost

# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/46 27 July 2022



Above: Two young swifts Photo by Roger Hewitt Below: an adult swift leaving the box after feeding the young.

Photo by Roger Hewitt



# **News of Briantspuddle Swifts**

Angie Talbot: I am delighted to report that 'our' wonderful swifts that faithfully return each year to the nest boxes at the village hall, have occupied all five boxes this year and every pair have young. If you are lucky you may have seen the youngster's faces peering out of the entrance holes.





Swift boxes in context of village hall. Photos by Margaret Cheetham



Once these young swifts pluck up the courage to launch themselves out of the entrance hole, that's it – they will be on the wing until they return to us again at the end of April next year. Non-stop flying, they will not perch, sit on the overhead wires or land on the ground. When they leave the nest they fly to southern Africa – to the Congo, Mozambique and on to the east African coast. Imagine them there in the sun while you are eating your Christmas dinner! We now know that's where they'll be as Bird A320 from Cambridgeshire was tagged with a geolocator and tracked there. (2010)

But for the moment, every evening the whole group of adult birds made up of breeding pairs, plus 'prospectors' from last year and the year before that, form up into 'screaming parties' flying at phenomenal speed over the colony, showing what superb fliers they are, eventually coming in crazily fast to roost in the boxes, hardly appearing to brake at all and each bird shooting straight for their entrance hole, then the chattering greetings from inside the box. How we will miss them!

By the time you read this some of the youngsters may have fledged, and amazingly, within a few days, will be on their way south. The parents will follow as soon as all their 'babies' have left the nest as their job is now complete. And then comes the long months to wait in anticipation of the first sight of that black sickle-shaped bird whizzing over the village once again.

However please remember that the Common Swift (*Apus apus*) is now on the Red List due to a severe decline in numbers. There are less nest sites available as we tidy up our buildings and block up holes and crevices, and a lack of insects that the swifts feed on (Remember when your car windscreen used to be covered in squashed insects at the end of a long journey).

For information on how to help keep our swifts please see <u>www.swift-conservation.org</u>.

Margaret Cheetham: regarding Angie's comment on squashed insects, it's interesting to note that we still get these when driving in Spain and Portugal. Not here, anymore, as Angie points out. This sadly shows how much biodiversity the UK has lost.

Tasie Russell: One Clouded Yellow butterfly feeding on Field Scabious this afternoon (26 July). Unfortunately I did not have a camera.

#### And something not so positive...

Vivi Armitage: Whilst having a swim recently a very large Grass snake (I think) came along the edge of the pool and I wasn't quite sure that he wasn't going to join me in the water. Fortunately he decided against!

The next day I went to check on the raised strawberry bed and found this Grass snake tangled up in the netting. Alec cut the net away but it was sadly already dead. I am not quite sure what we would have done if it had still been wriggling as it was well and truly twisted up. He/she was one of the larger ones we have seen recently here.





Entangled dead grass snake Photos by Vivi Armitage

Margaret Cheetham: I remember that Graham Lightfoot wrote about this problem some years ago, but I'm unable to locate the issue. There are also many websites that offer advice on alternative netting. Here's one:

<a href="https://www.unine.ch/files/live/sites/karch/files/Doc">https://www.unine.ch/files/live/sites/karch/files/Doc</a> a telecharger/Foerderung Amphibien Reptilien/Snakes garden netting (Final 050814).pdf</a>

#### Soldierfly

Adrian Middleton: Wandering round the rather parched garden this weekend looking for somewhere more refreshing I checked the pond where I spotted this fly on some vegetation. To all intents and purposes it resembled a flattened wasp, and appeared to behave rather clumsily in flight and general movement (not a surprise to me considering my initial conclusions about it). Chris Nother, as far as he could, kindly identified it as a Banded General soldierfly (Stratiomys potamida).

There are other soldierflies, some called one form of "General" or another. This fly also usually frequents wet areas and its larva is both carnivorous and amphibious. So it all fitted together.



Banded General soldierfly Photo by Adrian Middleton

Ian Cross: Yes, a female Stratiomys potamida. Up to the 1970s this magnificent soldierfly was a bit of a rarity. This is another species that has expanded its range enormously in recent years and is now fairly frequent over much of England and Wales. The adults love flowers and I find the best way to see them is to examine the great 'dinner-plate' inflorescences of Hemlock Water-dropwort or Hogweed.

Soldierfly names are fun and, appropriately enough, are often based on military ranks. We've had the very similar Ornate Brigadier (*Odontomyia ornata*) in the garden – so Adrian's fly outranks ours!

Raven at Moreton

Photo by Helen Frost





Patrick Grove-White: In Allotments Plantation on 30 July, we saw this Giant Woodwasp (Urocerus gigas) ovipositing its eggs into a Douglas Fir blown over in Storm Eunice. You can see the black ovipositor going vertically from its underside into the wood. I shall now watch out for Sabre Wasps - they search for the ovipositor holes so that their larvae can eat the Woodwasp larvae.

## Giant Woodwasp (Urocerus gigas)

Photo by Patrick Grove-White



*lan Cross*: It's good to have sightings of the Giant Woodwasp in the parish. Where they are established its special parasite, the Sabre Wasp (*Rhyssa persuasoria*) is often not far behind. Here's a photo of one to show what to look out for:



# **ID Question: Submitted by Helen Lilley**

Helen Lilley: found in my front room. I think it might be a Jersey Tiger Moth Ian Cross: Yes, Jersey Tiger - an unmistakeable species



# Amelia Chorley's Lockdown Project



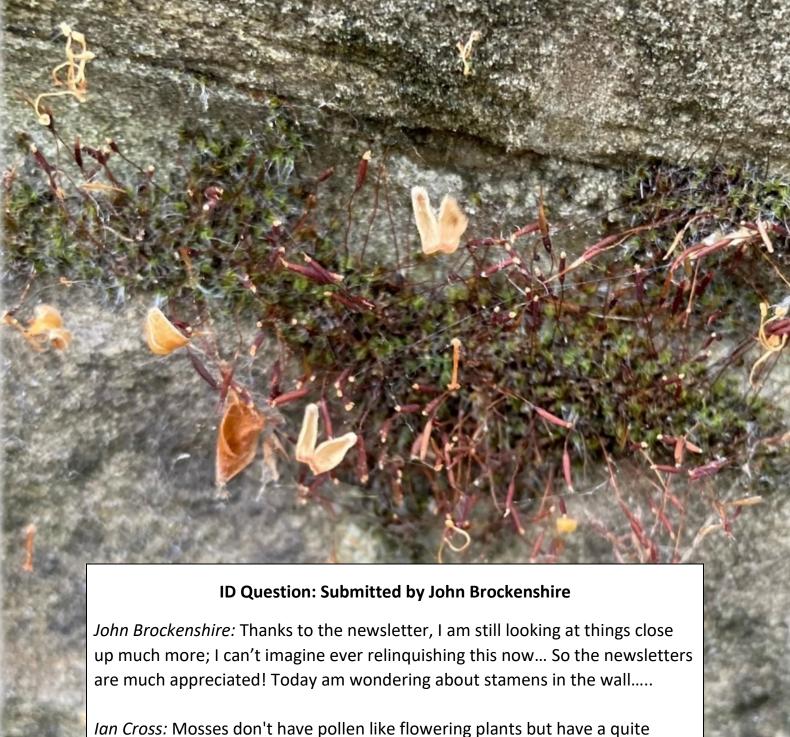


During afternoon tea in the village hall on 31 July, Amelia Chorley, vulnerable during covid and therefore having to isolate, gave a speech on how she had come up with a village embroidery project. The result is amazing, shown in the Grand Reveal above. This newsletter features one of the squares – the bumblebee by Lindy Ventham.



Bumblebee by Lindy Ventham

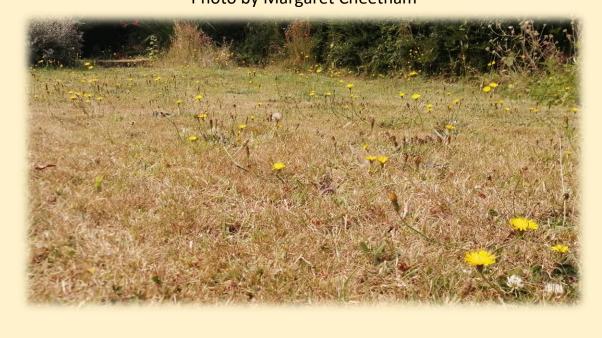
*Ian Cross*: Excellent detail, to the extent that it's possible to recognise not only that it's a bumblebee but even suggest a possible identity. My guess is a Garden Bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*).



lan Cross: Mosses don't have pollen like flowering plants but have a quite different system of reproduction involving alternating generations. What you can see are the Sporophytes. These spore-bearing structures have a thin stem or 'seta' with a bulging capsule (the long, cylindrical, purplish bits) on top which contains the spores. You can just make out what look like little, conical, pointed, pale 'pixie caps' at the tip of each capsule. Each of these is a little cap or 'calyptra' which breaks off to allow the spores to be shed. Once shed, the spores germinate to produce the next gametophyte generation and the cycle goes on.

I'm no Bryologist (expert on mosses and liverworts) but this could be *Hypnum cupressiforme*.

# A beautiful brown lawn – wild flowers and no mowing! Photo by Margaret Cheetham



Angie Talbot: Message from Lesley Haskins to say that the cattle have had to be taken off the Erica Trust heath due to lack of natural water supply. Next year Jake will try to get them onto the heath earlier in the season.



#### **ID Question:**

Kate Gainsford: this is on the wall of our conservatory....

Not moving one millimetre. About 25mm (1 inch).

*Ian Cross*: It's the chrysalis of a Large White butterfly.

Kate Gainsford: Of course. I should have noticed more of them. We have noticed lots of Large Whites about but I didn't connect the two because the caterpillar looks as though it would produce something more exotic. Should I put it in the garden?

*Ian Cross:* it would be difficult to detach

without damaging it. It might emerge in the



Large White chrysalis Photo: Kate Gainsford

in the conservatory in a few days, or it might try to overwinter. I agree, the caterpillars (below) do look a bit too exotic for the butterflies.



#### **Strawberry Seed Beetle**

Adrian Middleton: In mid-July I found a certain ground beetle drawn to a light in my garden. There were not just one or two but about a thousand individuals - handfuls in fact. It was one of those very warm overcast evenings. The event appeared to be a "one-off". Hamish Murray identified the beetle as the very common Strawberry Seed Beetle (*Harpalus rufipes*). It is omnivorous including eating seeds and is common in arable areas especially where it is dry. With strawberries still on the menu I should not have been surprised to find it!



Strawberry Seed Beetle (Harpalus rufipes) Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### Wildlife under stress

*Ian Cross*: It's not unusual to find a dead shrew lying in the middle of a track, apparently in perfect condition, with no sign of a violent death, yet totally lifeless. I find them from time to time, perhaps on a few occasions each year and, apart from a moment's musing on what may have caused its death, it's not a particularly noteworthy event.

However, on a recent morning walk through Piddle Wood and Kite Hill Plantation – a length of no more than 700 metres – I came across four of these forlorn corpses. They were scattered separately and constituted one Pygmy Shrew, two Common Shrews and a Mole.

Now, this <u>was</u> something out of the ordinary. What could have caused this mass extermination? As I pondered, two things struck me. Firstly, these weren't the only ones —I had been finding dead shrews quite frequently on morning walks in the previous week or so. Secondly, there was something that linked this unfortunate quartet and all the other recent deaths.

They were all small mammals – obviously – but they were also all insectivores: mammals that made a living hunting small invertebrates of all kinds. This perhaps was their undoing. During this long dry spell all sorts of terrestrial creepy-crawlies will have been less active. At risk of desiccation, they will have 'hunkered-down' and reduced their activity in distance and duration, making them much harder to find.

Insectivorous mammals live their lives on the edge at the best of times. All sorts of figures are given for how much and how constantly shrews need to eat just to keep their metabolism ticking over. Perhaps this drought has been the straw that broke the camel's back and tipped them over into starvation. Just a theory really, but I would be interested to hear if anyone else has noticed more dead shrews than usual.

### **Perfectly Coiled Poo!**

Helen Lilley: We spotted this perfectly coiled bird poo on a balustrade!





Bird poo photos by Helen Frost

# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/49 8 August 2022







Stills from a video taken by Lucy Sherwood of a Swallow nest in the bus shelter.

## **Barn Owl Update**



Barn Owl at Throop Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: The Barn Owls at Throop have bred, but don't know how many young. The one in the photos I think is a juvenile, but as big as the adults now. It just keeps popping out of the box then goes back in for a while, being very inquisitive as a youngster should be. It should be fledging any time now. The photos were taken at least 200 metres from the box and it was getting dark, so not of great quality.



Barn Owl at Throop Photo by Roger Hewitt

#### **Horticultural Show, 6 August 2022**

Congratulations to Maggie and Ron Hoyle and to Adrian Middleton (joint winners) for their gardens, as judged from the roadside. Although the judging was not done on wildlife appeal, the variety and colour in both gardens is attractive to wildlife. See National Trust advice below on wildlife-friendly gardening:

https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/nine-ways-to-build-a-wildlife-friendly-garden



The Briantspuddle garden of Maggie and Ron Hoyle



The Affpuddle garden of Adrian Middleton, showing much of the planting done by his late wife Vireen.

# Bird Update by Roger Hewitt 6 August 2022

Roger Hewitt: I had a walk around Black Hill and Kite Hill, but it was still a bit quiet birdwise. Spotted Flycatchers are starting to show in family groups now. I have seen five different family groups in the past week and I think three have bred locally. They tend to hang around, building themselves up ready for their migration trip when they start to leave in early September, unlike Willow Warblers that have started their migration now, with around 100 leaving Portland Bill this week. A few will linger until the end of August, then the Chiffchaff will take over.



Spotted Flycatcher Photo by Roger Hewitt

I have to mention the Stonechat as they have had another very good year. Linnets have also done well, as did the Tree Pipits, and I hope Woodlarks have done well too. In the water meadows I saw several pairs of Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers as well as a family of Cetti's Warbler by the footbridge. Finally I have to mention how good it is to see a few House Martins nesting at Throop.



Juvenile Stonechat Photo by Roger Hewitt

## **ID Question and Photo by Kate Gainsford**

Kate Gainsford:
A Cranefly I presume,
but I've never seen one
this size or noticed such
beautifully patterned
wings.

Tipula maxima. (See newsletter 2022/17)



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
Please send your contributions to <a href="mailto:macheetham@hotmail.co.uk">macheetham@hotmail.co.uk</a>.
I will confirm receipt. If you don't hear from me it means I haven't received your email, so please make contact through
Briantspuddle Community Website and we'll sort out a Plan B.



Angela Herrera: This chap landed on my back pack when I was at Culpepper's Dish today. It was under oak trees.



### Observed in the garden (Briantspuddle)

Jamie McMillan: I noticed a lot of these - Ragwort & Marjoram was swarming with them (c 10 on 1 plant)! Eriothrix rufomaculata, a common tachinid fly - I think that parasitizes small caterpillars. I don't think there is anything else with red sides like these, so easy to identify.

*Ian Cross*: There are several 'lookalikes' with this pattern e.g. *Mintho rufiventris, Aphria longirostris* etc. so care needs to be taken. However, I can confirm this is *Eriothrix*.



Eriothrix rufomaculata, a common tachinid fly
Photo by Jamie McMillan



#### A Discussion on the Grayling (Adrian Middleton and Ian Cross)

Adrian Middleton: The Grayling butterfly is essentially a summer butterfly whose favoured habitats include heathland. It can be shy and elusive and is easily disturbed, quickly flying up, only to drop down into cover or some open ground further along, closing its wings quickly, facing the sun to reduce its shadow and, now well-camouflaged, more or less disappearing from view. The upperside markings are not normally seen at all well at any time, let alone photographed. It can be seen on some forestry rides with mixed habitat in the parish for example near Sares Wood.

Only the other day on heathland I saw a pair of these insects courting, flying about together and finally alighting on the ground. The female, in the rather hurried distant photo (enlarged), is showing her upper wing markings whilst the male also present has wings more or less closed as usual. They soon flew off together and I carried on my walk.



Grayling Photo by Adrian Middleton

*Ian Cross*: Far from being a shy butterfly, I find the Grayling to be one of our most approachable species. But, as with building any tentative relationship with a wild creature, you have to let the butterfly make the first move.

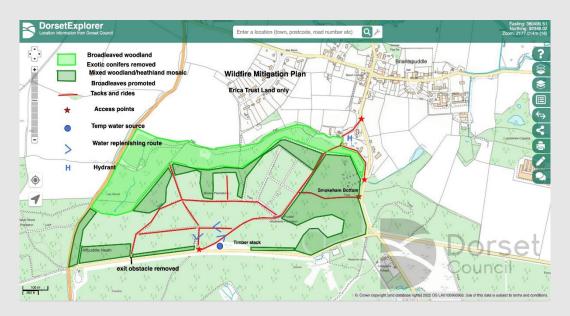
You will notice that the Grayling is very fond of perching, head down, on tall upright objects - classically they choose pine tree trunks. So, if you stand absolutely still on any heathland track in the presence of these lively butterflies, one will often fly in your direction and perch on you! I often try the experiment of keeping still and seeing how many adornments I can acquire. The most Graylings I have had sitting on me at one time is three.

Once perched, the butterflies are remarkably tolerant of a little movement on your part, even though you're supposed to be a tree trunk. You can turn your head and peer close, enjoying a face-to-face encounter. Though I find they always seem to draw the line at me getting my camera out for a 'family & friends' portrait.

#### Wildlife and Wildfires

Lesley Haskins: "10 acres of heath have been destroyed at ......." is the usual headline when a wildfire occurs on our Dorset heathland/forest landscape. Actually fire does not 'destroy' heathland but 'resets it' in that it is taken back to the 'pioneer stage' from which it progresses again through various stages eventually to reach 'mature' heath. Each stage is different, sometimes markedly so, in the complement of species it supports. Give an ant expert a sample of ants from any bit of heath and they will be able to tell you fairly accurately how long ago that bit of heath was burnt! So burns, and other ground disturbances, add to biodiversity.

However, burning clearly kills the less mobile species, including rare reptiles, so that large burns or repeated burns can have very negative impact, especially on heathland already small and fragmented. And naturally they are of concern for nearby property. So all managed heathlands/forests these days have **Wildfire Mitigation Plans (WMPs)** based on advice given by the expert specialist officer from the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service.



Wildfire Mitigation Plan in context of Bladen Valley and Briantspuddle

The WMP for Erica Trust Land was drawn up before our works began and includes both immediately implemented and long term elements. Good vehicle access is crucial, hence our improvements to the main track running in from the timber stack gate on the top road down to the Smokeham Bottom gate off The Hollow, this providing a vital firm in-and-out route through the site. Additionally we have retained and improved the old rides network and some of the timber extraction routes will also be kept open as fire breaks - especially that running parallel to the top road.



Our expert advice is that broadleaved woodland is a good natural barrier to fire so all our removal/reduction of the exotic conifers and the encouragement/natural replacement with broadleaves in the long band of

northern woodland is restoring the original fire retardant barrier between the plateau and any properties below. Indeed broadleaves will be encouraged all round the perimeter ET land and in the other retained or redeveloping woodland areas such as around the old quarry and the slope east of The Hollow road. A plan is provided to assist and give other detail. (Does not include Allotments Plantation land).

A vital role of course can be played by any members of the public reporting the appearance of smoke or even the smell of fire via 999. Such reports go not just to the Fire and Rescue Service but a network of countryside workers on a special WhatsApp group, any of whom might be placed at any time to check out such reports. I subscribe to this Group and have been interested to see how many reports and callouts to ordinary farmland there are - the engine which roared through Briantspuddle village a few weeks ago was en route to a straw fire near Moreton for example. So any of us driving/walking/cycling/riding anywhere can help by dialling 999 if they see or smell anything worrying

The Fire Service always say they would far rather have a false alarm than a real fire not reported.

If anyone has any questions about this, or indeed any other matter on our land, please do feel free to put them to me, maybe by means of the newsletter so as to share them and the answers, or direct to me on lesleyhaskins@hotmail.co.uk

#### Helen Frost:

Little owl heard calling around 4 am in next door's garden (Affpuddle)!

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
Please send your contributions to <a href="mailto:macheetham@hotmail.co.uk">macheetham@hotmail.co.uk</a>.
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Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter
No 2022/51 12 August 2022



Same frog during dip in pond Photo by Adrian Middleton

# Wildfire Mitigation Plan Feedback (Newsletter 50)

Henry Hogger: Thanks, as always, for an excellent newsletter. I was particularly interested to see the Wildfire Mitigation Plan (WMP) for the Erica Trust land, as potentially relevant to my little triangle of heathland the other side of the crossroads.

We haven't got a formal WMP; although the last lot of major works under my management agreement with Natural England included opening a wide firebreak all the way up the boundary with the MoD land on the far side from the road, and across the middle from near the northernmost cattle grid.

#### **Date for your Diaries**

Henry Hogger: I would like to alert readers to an event at the end of this month to mark the presence of the prestigious Earth Photo exhibition at the Moors Valley Country Park near Ringwood.

On Wednesday 31 August, from 6 pm, you can join the team from Forestry England - joint sponsors of the exhibition with the **Royal Geographical Society** (RGS) - for a short briefing followed by a walk out to view the photo panels in their forest setting. The event, which is free to attend, will conclude with a glass of wine or soft drink at the Park's open-air picnic area.

Please see www.rgs.org/events for more info and booking details.

#### **Striking Diptera gold**

Jamie McMillan: My first tentative venture out into the heat (I can only stand about 30 mins of it) struck Diptera gold with a Heath Bee-fly on my Marjoram. Camera ran out of juice, but I managed one shot more or less in focus. Looking on the NBN map, there is a dot on Briantspuddle already - I assume it's lan's record? Anyway, new for my garden list! The NBN map shows how much of a Dorset speciality this is - and goes further west than I realised.



Heath Bee-fly in the garden Photo by Jamie McMillan

*Ian Cross*: An excellent find! Yes, the dot smack in the middle of Briantspuddle is one of my records – as are several other dots on the map. (As a useful hint

when working with NBN maps, if you click on the dot itself, it actually brings up the record details, often with the date, locality and recorder's name.)

I highly recommend that anyone interested in our wildlife's distribution checks out these maps. Just google the Latin name followed by NBN.

I'm hoping we will see more of this smashing little bee-fly around the parish in the near future. It's a parasite of the Heather Colletes bee (*Colletes succinctus*) which is currently becoming established on the Erica Trust reserve (and even makes its way to our garden from time to time). The bee is spreading closer and closer and is even nesting in localities right on the edge of the village.

The bee-fly is a fluffy, brown ball with a long, protruding proboscis (see photo below). It's a dead ringer for the Dark-edged Bee-fly, which is so common in the parish in the spring, but doesn't have the chocolate-brown margin on the wings. If your bee-fly won't settle for identification don't panic. Mere timing identifies the Heath Bee-fly as the Dark-edged Bee-fly is never out this late in the year.



Heath Bee-fly. Note the long, pointed proboscis, typical of Bombylius – photo Ian Cross

# **Wall Brown butterfly**

in Affpuddle on 29th July Photo by Helen Frost



*Ian Cross*: A lovely male. It's encouraging to have records of this, one of our fastest declining UK butterflies. It's assessed as 'Near Threatened' in the butterfly red list.

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/52 14 August 2022



With no nest to speak of, these Nightjar chicks rely on superb camouflage for safety.

Note how the last few fluffy down feathers blurs their outline.

#### **Erica Trust Nightjars breeding success**

*Ian Cross*: It's now safe to reveal the location of the nightjar nest mentioned in newsletter 43 on the 16<sup>th</sup> July. By time you read this, these two chicks will have fully fledged and will already be well on their way to the nightjar wintering grounds south of the African rain forest belt.

The nest was on the recently-cleared plateau area of Erica Trust Heath and – while all the signs meant we were pretty certain that nightjars were nesting – represents the first absolute proof of success.

Nightjars nest on relatively bare ground, with the only protection for the eggs or chicks being amazing camouflage. This sounds like a very high-risk strategy but there are features that help, and the young birds also have other tricks up their sleeves.

One thing I have noticed, and which doesn't seem to have been described before, is how the last of the fluffy down feathers actually blur the youngster's outline (see photo above). This is important, as the very best camouflage is of no use if it leaves a perceptible bird outline on view.

From about ten days after hatching the young nightjars have another weapon they can deploy. They will hiss loudly while opening their mouths, revealing an enormous, pink gape. At the same time they may twist their necks or make sudden leaps. All this is a pretty convincing copy of an adder's threat display and is also extremely startling, enough to drive-off the most persistent predator.

These youngsters were quite late developing, so probably represent a second brood. If so, this would be a double triumph as only about a fifth of breeding pairs manage this.

Adult birds are still calling and displaying around nesting territories but these will fall start to silent towards the end of the month. So, there's just time to get your evening nightjar 'fix' if you're quick. I'm also still seeing adult birds feeding over the water meadows – though with rapidly declining frequency.

The majority of birds will leave in September.

#### **Colour varieties of the Jersey Tiger Moth**

Adrian Middleton: All tiger moths are colourful. Some are reasonably common such as the Scarlet Tiger, whilst others such as the Garden Tiger have declined in numbers. Amongst them there is also the Jersey Tiger (the stripes show on the upper wings).

This particular tiger has spread over comparatively recent years especially in southern England. They may be active night or day. The bright red markings on

the underwings are not obvious when the moth is at rest but on a warm summer's day when in full flight the red colouring shows well.



The red and yellow underwing varieties of the Jersey Tiger moth. Photos by Adrian Middleton



Only this week in the garden I spotted a Jersey Tiger fluttering about. It came to rest on the lawn, initially still showing its bright underwing markings which in this case were decidedly yellow, with the black spots. However it soon closed its wings but by then I had my photograph.

I understand the yellow underwing colour is seen less often than the red and that some others take on an orange hue, a sort of mixture of the other two colours. There seem to be quite lot of Jersey Tiger moths about this summer so I shall be looking out most closely for the various colours on display.

#### **Whinchats and Bird Migration**

Roger Hewitt: I spotted a Whinchat in the water meadows on the 9th August. Last year's bird stayed around for a time, mainly because they go into moult to get some nice new feathers before heading off to their wintering grounds in the tropical sub-Saharan Africa, so I'm hoping this one might do the same.



Whinchat Photo by Roger Hewitt

The wintering grounds range from Senegal east to Kenya and south to Zambia. In the UK their breeding grounds are more north and west as it likes large open

areas of rough pasture with some scattered shrubs as it likes to perch up to sing and dive down on insects to feed. Its breeding range is right across Europe to Asia.

I only see one or two each autumn in the parish but they have been regular for a few years now.

I still find bird migration amazing in that young birds travel all that way and in most cases all on their own. I also wonder what effect climate change is having. We already get some birds over-wintering that never used to, as in Chiffchaff, Blackcap and even some Swallows being seen in December and January. I'm not sure if the Swallows ever survive a full winter though.

Last year we had a late holiday on Skye (Scotland) and I was amazed how many Stonechats were still up there. On speaking to one of the top birders, I was told they will stay until the really bad weather sets in and only then will they move south. I wonder what the future has in store for us and the wildlife.



Whinchat Photo by Roger Hewitt

# **Magpie Moth** Photo by Helen Frost



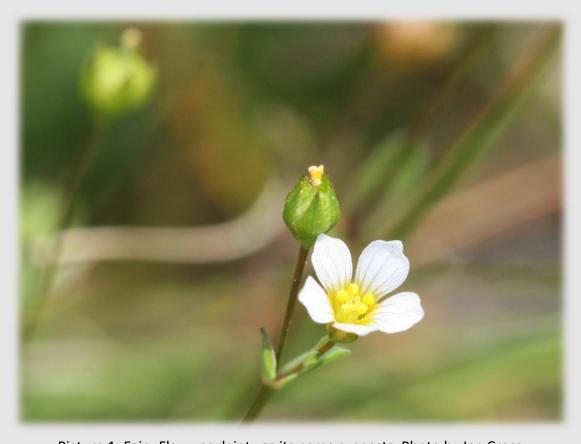
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#### Flax in the parish

lan Cross: Some years ago farm subsidies were available for growing Flax as a source of vegetable oil. The plants used were cultivars of *Linum usitatissimum* and it wasn't unusual for fields in our area to be a carpet of dazzling pale, skyblue in the spring. These formed a lovely contrast with the shocking yellow of Oilseed Rape which was also in fashion at the time. Fashions change, subsidies disappear and this plant has since largely vanished from the parish. I haven't seen cultivated Flax for some time, though it remains a common constituent of birdseed mixtures and the odd self-sown individual may still turn up in unexpected places.

Luckily, two wild, native species of flax still grow in the parish, though they take a little searching for. One of these is the appropriately-named Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*). If that name suggests to you a tiny, slender plant you're not far off the mark – see picture 1. Though its other traditional name 'Purging Flax' (which is alluded to in the Latin 'catharticum') suggests it's not as feeble as it seems.



Picture 1: Fairy Flax – as dainty as its name suggests. Photo by Ian Cross.

Fairy Flax can grow on sand but seems to prefer a well-drained, calcareous soil and it's commonest on chalk downland. In our parish it meets these exacting needs by occupying heathland tracks that are surfaced with a 'ballast' of crushed limestone. In such sites it should be searched for on the track edges, where the vegetation is sparser and trampled, but not too much.

Our other flax is the equally lovely Pale Flax (*Linum bienne*). The flowers have five tissue-thin, pale blue petals (picture2). Some botanists think it is probably the wild ancestor of cultivated flax. A feature of flaxes is that the flowers are fragile and readily shed their petals – often for no apparent reason. I was unsatisfied with this picture and turned back to take another. As I looked at the plant, a single petal silently fell away, totally spoiling the composition. I swear it did it on purpose!



Picture 2: Pale Flax – the flowers are extremely delicate and liable to drop petals at any moment. Photo by Ian Cross

Pale Flax likes dry, grassy places. Like its smaller relative it prefers a little touch of lime in the soil and it's not worth searching for it on pure heathland. Calcareous, ever-so-slightly nutrient-enriched road verges across the open heath are the best places to investigate.

The original use of flax was as a source of a natural fibre. Indeed, the word for the material woven from this, linen, derives from the Latin name *Linum*. In recent times the main use has been for the seeds, which are pressed to produce a rich vegetable oil. The seed heads of flaxes are distinctive and even in the wild relatives can be readily found, long after the flowers have finished. The seed heads of Pale Flax can be seen in picture 3.



Picture 3: Pale Flax seed heads. Photo by Ian Cross.

Linseed oil (there's that name *Linum* again) was once used to protect wood as a varnish, as a binder for paint pigments, for hardening putty and in the manufacture of linoleum. These uses have been usurped as synthetic substitutes have emerged but the edible version of flax oil is still very much in demand in the food industry.

#### A new species for the garden

Jamie McMillan: Great news! A good morning in the garden here with a new butterfly species for my garden - Grayling. Pity it chose bubble-wrap as a settling area, but you can't have everything! (The bubble wrap is to stop moths drowning in the pond).



Graying on bubblewrap! Photo by Jamie McMillan

This was after finding my second Beautiful Marbled moth in the trap - even if this wasn't a great rarity it would be an exciting moth to find with those improbable colours. It is gradually colonising Britain from Southern Europe, but is still confined to the south and east coasts. The food-plant is thistle, so it might even have bred locally - it looks fresh enough. The map is three years out of date, but you can see how rare this moth is! The moths website has come online over the winter and is incredibly useful for mothing folk.

https://dorsetmoths.co.uk/index.php?bf=24091

# Margaret's favourite wildlife.....

Margaret Cheetham: Back by popular demand (mine, that is. I can't get enough of amphibians)



Frog emerging from Affpuddle garden pond (with duckweed on its back)

Photo by Adrian Middleton

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/54 21 August 2022



#### **ID Question**

Julia and Ken Olisa: On a walk to Turnerspuddle from Throop yesterday, we met a family by the first ford who showed us the beautiful spider they had spotted. Is it really called the 'wasp spider'?



Photo by Julia Olisa

*Ian Cross*: Correct! Newsletter 2021/171 (6 September 2021) features this wonderful spider and some of its unfortunate prey.

#### What's this?

Adrian Middleton: Tidying up the garden table one morning of late I noticed a strange object more like a broken twig than anything. A much closer look identified it as a Pale Prominent moth which I must have disturbed.

This moth is very striking in its own way with projections at the front, the tail and in the middle. It was lying on its side more or less so no legs were apparent. After a quick photo I placed it in some cover nearby once I realised what it was.



Pale Prominent Moth Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### **Thanatosis**

Many species of insect, when they feel threatened by a potential predator, will display a behaviour known as thanatosis (or 'playing dead'). The insect will often fall to the ground and tuck in any protruding legs or antennae. The insect will remain like this for some time, even when prodded or poked by the predator. Some time after the predator has lost interest the insect will start moving again and make its escape.

Thanatosis is displayed by many animals (including some mammals and reptiles) and, amongst the insects, it is commonly found among the beetles - ladybirds are particularly good at 'playing dead'.

https://www.amentsoc.org/insects/glossary/terms/thanatosis/

# Driving out of the village on 19 August: swans and cygnets

Photos by Margaret Cheetham

Margaret Cheetham: As a queue formed behind me (well, three cars, but that's a queue in Briantspuddle), the only way to get the little family to move was to wind down the window and gently say "off you go". And so they did.









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#### **Premature Leaf Fall**

*Ian Cross*: A carpet of Beech leaves on a woodland track – nothing unusual about that. Except, there's a lot of green leaves among them and, what's more, this is only the 24<sup>th</sup> August!



A carpet of beech tree leaves Photo by Ian Cross

Frequently in the past week or two I have stood silently on a woodland track with no noise around me apart from the ominous faint rustle of gently falling leaves. This is a very disturbing sign – the sound of trees giving up on this year and calling it quits. Along with the exceptional number of dead small mammals I've noticed recently, this is another disturbing portent of this year's drought. Fortunately, although some trees are throwing in the towel for the summer, they are not giving up on life itself. With the exception of the odd seedling on shallow soils in unusually hot and sunny spots which has been killed outright, most trees will leaf again as normal in the spring.

It doesn't seem to be all trees that are so drastically affected. Beech, with their shallow root systems, are having a hard time but Oaks, with deep tap roots, are carrying on as if nothing were amiss.

Indeed, I have seen some Oaks showing evidence of that other phenomenon associated with a long, hot summer – Lammas growth. This is a second flush of fresh green shoots that is sometimes seen around Lammas day, the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. In good summers the trees can afford the second growth spurt and it is a feature most often seen on oak trees.

So it's an ill wind.....

Hummingbird Hawk-moth in the house
Photo by Adrian Middleton



Adrian Middleton: The Hummingbird Hawk-moth seems to be widespread this year, spotted in my garden almost daily during the warm weather this summer, always hovering over flowers such as phlox and darting here, there and everywhere. The current sighting was only the second time in decades that I have seen one completely still. On this occasion I found it settled on the landing carpet one evening, almost waiting to be trodden on. I covered it over and moved it into better light. The photo above shows a small amount of the orange underwing and the distinctive markings on the forewings and tail, usually somewhat blurred when seen hovering (shown in an earlier newsletter). I had no more than three seconds grace to take the photo before it was gone, nowhere to be seen. So I felt very lucky.



And a photo of a Hummingbird Hawk-moth taken early summer

Photo by Adrian Middleton

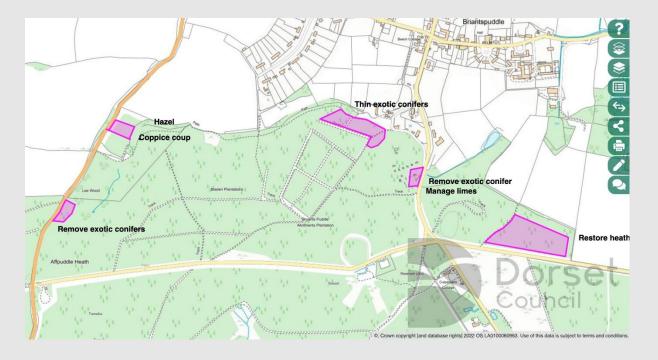
## **Erica Trust Land Update Autumn 2022**

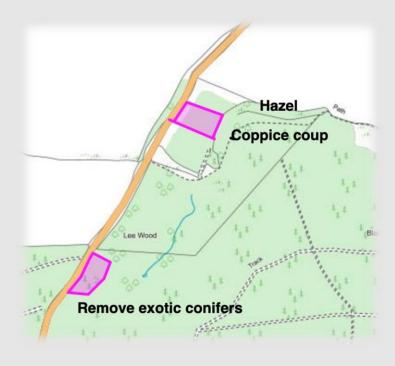
Lesley Haskins: It has been wonderfully gratifying to have had so many reports of the wildlife expanding over or colonising the restored habitats of our landholding and to hear of those enjoying the recovering landscape.

With the major works completed on our main land holding west of The Hollow Road, we are now following up with small scale improvements on some of the more tricky bits and pieces.

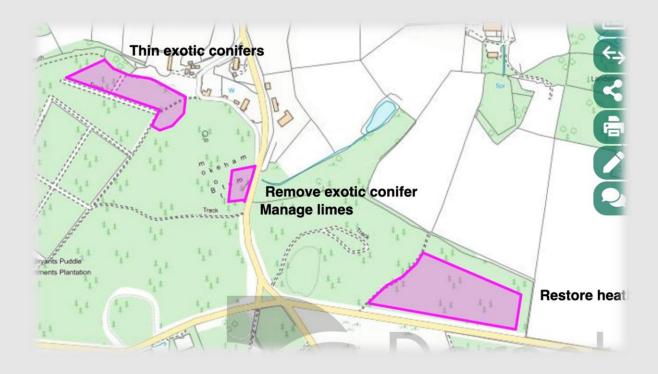
Foremost amongst these will be the wet ground at the base of Smokeham Bottom (just up from the entrance to Blackdown House) where we will be taking out the remaining few tall conifers which have proved troublesome. The lovely line of limes planted along the roadside, but grown so leggy because of the conifer shading, will be crown reduced, pollarded or coppiced according to their individual shapes - limes respond well to all these treatments.

Oaks planted last winter further up the road have managed to survive this exceptional summer.





Close-ups of the map on previous page



There will be some thinning out of the exotic conifers north of Allotments Plantation i.e. mostly those which can been seen protruding above the skyline when looking up from the bus shelter.

Right over the in the west, alongside the Affpuddle Road, the discreet enclave of exotic conifers will be removed.

All extraction will be either southwards through the site and/ or along the roads to our usual the timber stack area.

Also alongside the Affpuddle Road a second tranche of coppicing will take place and the deer fencing moved from the now well grown first tranche to protect the new tranche.

General ongoing management will include more gorse coppicing along the 'top road'.

On our land holding east of The Hollow Road (known as Hollow Woods) we have previously thinned out exotic conifers west of the bisecting footpath to encourage mixed woodland. East of the footpath we now intend to take out all the exotic conifers to restore heathland which will connect over the road to that owned and managed by Henry Hogger. The marginal broadleaved woodland will of course be retained and encouraged. Like our main land, this area also has a Wildfire Mitigation Plan, including the fire retardant broadleaved woodland and access provision.

We hope to start in mid-September and, as always, tolerance of our operations is much appreciated.

Do please get back to me if you have any questions.

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Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/56 27 August 2022



Eli with adult Palmate Newt Photo by Sam Spencer

## Eli returns to Affpuddle

Adrian Middleton: Eli has just been back to Affpuddle with his family, still very keen on natural history and raring to carry on our quest for reptiles and other wildlife where we left off last April.

Our initial wildlife search began with a quick inspection of the Compost Hotel but all was quiet there. This was followed by a search for amphibians which seemed most likely to bring rewards given the wet weather. We started at the garden pond and soon found some 15 or so newtlets, likely to be Palmates as Common Newts had never been seen there, although in both there are strong similarities at this immature stage. We soon also found an adult male Palmate Newt with a small but characteristic filamentous extension to its tail.

Nevertheless it was high time we saw one or other of our native snakes which had eluded us on all previous occasions when the seasons and conditions always seemed to be weighed against us.





Left: Setting off.
Right: Common Toad – an old acquaintance.
Photos by Sam Spencer

So at the first opportunity when the sun broke through heavy clouds we set off for some local heathland. On our way we saw an adult Common Toad exactly where one had been seen during our last expedition. This was followed by a Slow Worm and the discovery of an Adder's sloughed skin with its various typical markings. So things were looking promising.



Slow Worm (Left) and Lively Field Mouse (Right)
Photos by Sam Spencer

It was then that Sam spotted a young Grass Snake basking out by some short heather and showing black and green colouring. Unfortunately it disappeared before Eli and I could see it. Was this going to be our only chance?

Pressing on, we soon encountered a very lively field mouse and to our relief, before long, we all had a fine view of another Grass Snake with its yellow collar before it also quickly disappeared from sight into dense cover. This was Eli's first sighting of a British snake. This was good news and whilst a photo would

have been a bonus there had not been a realistic opportunity for this, given the snake's speedy retreat.

There was more to come and as the going got tougher so it was also time for the tough to get going, with a bit of care!



When the going gets tough Photo by Sam Spencer

Meantime Eli soon spotted Southern Hawker dragonflies, Holly Blues and other interesting insects as we progressed. Shortly afterwards and somewhat unexpectedly, at last we finally encountered a richly-coloured young female Adder under some old tin. It was quickly on the alert and ready for off, hissing occasionally.

Sam managed to photograph the Adder so providing us with another lasting memory of the time we had just spent successfully searching for some of our favourite wild animals. But all too soon we had to call it a day and I had to say goodbye to Emma, Sam and Eli. Hopefully our next meet up and wildlife encounter will come round sooner than later, in the near future.



Sub-adult Adder Photo Sam Spencer

#### **House Spiders**

James Gallop: because of the weather, are house spiders bigger than normal this year?

*Ian Cross:* no, but because of the weather they may be maturing earlier. Around this time of year many spiders become mature and reach their maximum size. Also adult males of the big *Tegenaria* species become very active in their search for females. They wander far and wide, more often than not ending-up trapped in baths. All this activity is why we become so aware of them at this time of year.

## **Ichneumon ID Question**

photo submitted by Julian Francis

Julian Francis: Does Ian know which one this is? Fancy legs!



*Ian Cross:* The subfamily Ophioninae includes many of the larger, nocturnal, Ichneumons that often come to moth traps. At the last count it contains 27 species in four genera. Your specimen's general appearance is one of these.

The Ophioninae is one of the smaller families in the Ichneumonidae (over 2,500 UK species and counting!) but, even then, identification to species can be difficult.

#### **Kestrel**

Roger Hewitt: One bird that seems to be struggling in our parish is the Kestrel; numbers are very low just now. I found a dead one the other day, but all that was left was some feathers. I brought some feathers home and checked them

out, which confirmed it was a Kestrel. I'm not sure how it died but it was in Goshawk territory and Goshawk will take Kestrels. But I have no proof of what killed this bird - just conjecture on my part.



Kestrel Photo by Roger Hewitt



Goshawk Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: Goshawks are now established in our parish and there is also another pair just outside of our parish. They are a top predator and I have been lucky enough to see one hunting. How quick and agile it is flying between trees, which is its natural habitat. In the open it's not quite so good. I watched one trying to catch a Wood Pigeon and it failed to keep up with the Wood

Pigeon and gave up the chase. But they are great birds to see and we have to accept that they are predators and will kill some of our favourite birds just to survive. The only good photo I have of a Goshawk was taken at the Birds of Prey centre at Lewell, near West Stafford.

#### **Cranefly ID Question**

Photo submitted by Julian Francis

Julian Francis: This Cranefly has the longest legs I've ever seen! So long it can hardly walk. Not one I've seen before.

#### Ian Cross:

It's a male *Tipula* subgenus *Tipula*.

There are two common ones: *Tipula paludosa* and *T. oleracea*which can be separated by details
of the claspers. *Tipula paludosa* is
the more likely but the usual caveat
applies about not basing IDs on which
is the more common species.



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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/57 29 August 2022

# Focus on – Caterpillars of the Nettle Butterflies

Text and Photos by Ian Cross



Picture 1: Peacock caterpillar – velvety-black with orange prolegs

Five closely-related butterflies are prominent among the customers at Buddleia through the summer: Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Comma. Curiously, although they form a tight-knit group, well-known and readily-recognised, these butterflies don't have a widely-used group name – the equivalent of 'Browns', 'Skippers' or 'Fritillaries' – like most other butterfly groups.

I have seen the term 'Aristocrats' used for these species, though I can't say I've **ever** met anyone who used this expression in day to day butterfly chat. So, instead, I'll refer to them as the 'Nettle Butterflies', as nettles form a major part of the caterpillar diet of four of them. I'll include the Painted Lady as an honorary member, even though its caterpillar rarely uses nettles, as it so clearly belongs with the others.

The caterpillars share one feature in common, they are armed with a battery of spines, each one branched and bristling with smaller spines. These are visible in the pictures below.

Caterpillars of the Peacock (picture 1) are a lovely velvety-black with white speckles. The only touch of colour is found on the four pairs of fleshy false legs, strictly called 'prolegs', which are a contrasting orange-brown. The caterpillars cluster together when young for protection but disperse singly when mature and ready to pupate. The masses of caterpillars often gather on fresh, young shoots near the tops of the nettles and are visible from some distance.



Picture 2: Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars – black with yellow markings around the spiracles

Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars (picture 2) are similar: black with paler prolegs but have yellow markings low down on the sides of each segment. These are arranged around the tiny white dots with a black centre, which mark the breathing holes or 'spiracles'. Like the Peacock, the caterpillars cluster in groups when young and, at that stage, are easy to find.

The Red Admiral caterpillar is quite variable and difficult to characterise. They tend to come in two forms. One is yellow, densely-speckled with dark dots, which give it an overall greyish colour (picture 3). The other form is black, with yellow crescents low on the sides. Young caterpillars can be quite striking colours (picture 4),



Picture 3: Red Admiral caterpillar – of the pale, yellowy-grey form



Picture 4: A young Red Admiral caterpillar can be quite vividly-coloured



Picture 5: Red Admiral caterpillar 'tent' in nettle leaf – a neatly-folded leaf 'sown' together with silk

Whereas Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars are easy to find – just look for the heaving masses of black caterpillars on nettle patches – the caterpillar of the Red Admiral takes a little more skill to track down. They live their whole lives singly, each caterpillar hidden in a neat 'tent' (picture 5) made by folding a nettle leaf lengthwise and sticking the edges together with caterpillar silk.

Painted Lady caterpillars are the odd-one-out among my 'nettle butterflies' in that they mainly feed on thistles. I have seen them on Mallows and, apparently, they will occasionally use nettles, though personally I have never seen them on that plant. The caterpillar is like a paler version of the light form of the Red Admiral (picture 6).



Picture 6: Painted Lady caterpillar – not on nettles

Whilst Peacocks and Tortoiseshells gather together for protection and Red Admirals spin their own little tent, the Comma caterpillar has an even more devious disguise. The rear part of the body has a broad, white 'smear' on the back (picture 7). The rest of the body is blackish, though it becomes more orange-tan as the caterpillar matures.

The caterpillar sits openly on a leaf with its front end curled round, almost in a question-mark shape. The overall effect is of a white and black curled blob that looks just like a bird dropping. This is the best camouflage of all: you can rest in full sight as nobody is interested in eating bird poo!

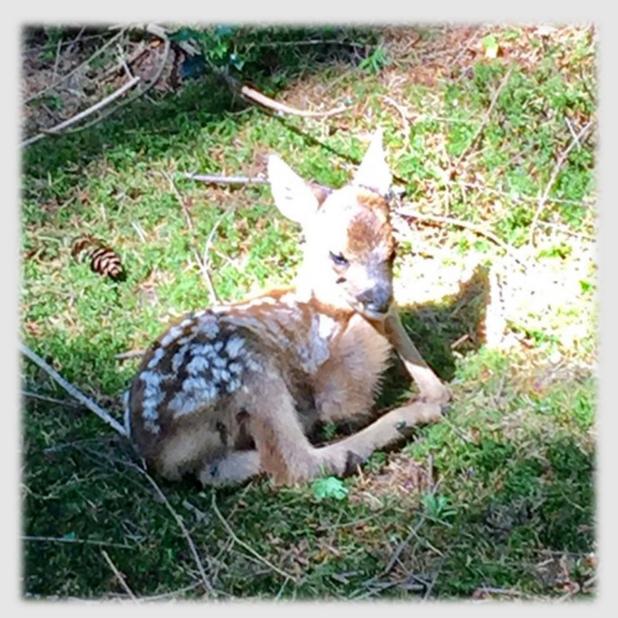
As well as nettles, Comma caterpillars will feed on hops and even the leaves of Elm trees. This may sound like a pretty eclectic choice of foods but it's not as weird as it sounds. Despite their very varied appearances, the three plant families: nettles, hops and elms are actually quite closely related.



Picture 7: Comma caterpillar – half grown but still showing its bird-dropping camouflage

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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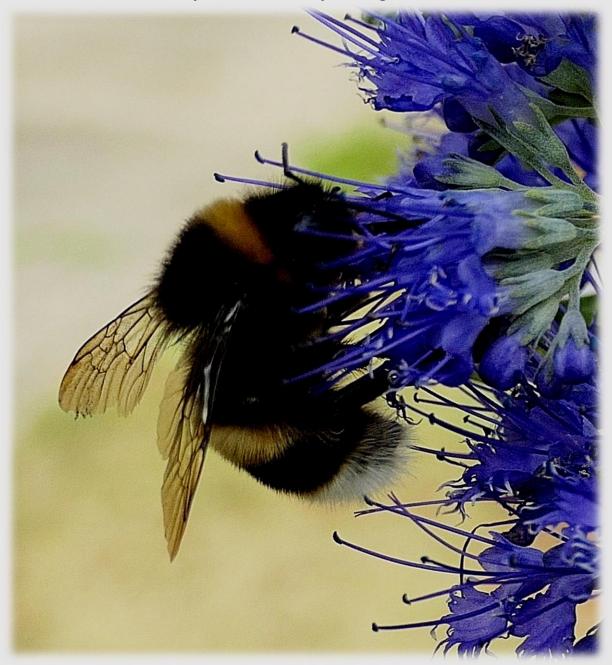
# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/58 31 August 2022



A week-old roe fawn in my wood (Allotments Plantation)
Photo by Patrick Grove-White

Patrick Grove-White: I was only very brief taking the photo as its mum was worrying nearby, so I didn't wait for the fly to get off the fawn's face (this is one of the main reasons why I have to restrict the public and dogs from wandering around Allotments Plantation).

# **Dry Conditions: Affpuddle garden**



Thriving in the dry weather Photo by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: The Caryopteris shrub in my garden has flourished during this year's dry conditions, producing abundant bright blue flowers which have attracted many bumblebees, like this one, for pollen and nectar.

**Dry Conditions: Long-tailed Tit at Affpuddle** 



Helen Frost: The Long-tailed Tit was sitting with its mouth open simply to cool down. Birds cannot sweat, so like dogs they pant with their mouths open to stop heat loss. This is known as "gular fluttering" - the avian version of panting. The panting can increase in speed and the birds may sometimes open their mouths even wider to get greater cooling levels.

# **Dry Conditions: Briantspuddle lawn**



Common Cat's-ear thriving in the dry lawn (less mowing – hurrah!)

Photos by Margaret Cheetham



# On the Fishing Lake

Roger Hewitt: Little Egrets have increased, with eight in one tree on the fishing lake, obviously taking advantage of the low water meadows, which makes it easier to catch some fish.



Little Egrets Photos by Roger Hewitt



**Leafhopper**Photo by Adrian Middleton



Adrian Middleton: Night lights can be helpful when enabling us to spot our nocturnal wildlife including lots of moths and many other creatures we might otherwise not see. And so it was recently when I discovered a very small insect near my moth trap which at first glance gave the impression it was a new moth species for me. This was enough to persuade me to photograph it without further thought or delay but just after so doing it hopped off into nowhere. That got me thinking! The photo provides some indication of colour; it was about 13 mm long (big for a leafhopper) and the "ears" do stand out rather.

In my intermittent discussions with Hamish Murray, he tells me it is the Eared Leafhopper (*Ledra aurita*). Apparently it can be very difficult to see on lichens, its favourite location but is attracted to artificial light such as moth traps provide. There may be more around than we think but I'm glad I had spotted it – a "first" in any case for me."

## Sika Hind and calf at Moreton

Photo by Helen Frost



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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## **A Shieldbug Parasite**

Photos and Text by Ian Cross

Picture 1 (above): A well-marked male is spectacular and unmistakable
Photo by Ian Cross

*Ian Cross*: The spectacular fly *Phasia hemiptera* is abundant in our garden at the moment. Perhaps one of the more remarkable things about it, is that it doesn't seem to have acquired a common name in England – despite being relatively large, sometimes colourful, unmistakeable and fairly common. I've seen the name 'Shieldbug Fly' used in Scotland, but there it is a recent colonist and the only species of its group found so far.

They are astonishingly variable. The females (picture 2) are generally smaller and with narrower wings. The palest examples can be almost clear winged, though the wings display all grades of smoky markings, all the way through to virtually all black. In contrast, the brightest males can have the wings shot through with bolts of electric blue (picture 1).



Picture 2 The female, especially if almost clear-winged like this one, is barely recognisable as belonging to the same species. Photo by Ian Cross

The wings are broad and short, with a curved leading edge and, when not in flight, are held permanently in a characteristic stiff V-shape. Combined with the wide, oval body this gives the flies something of the shape and proportions of their shieldbug hosts. Why this is so and how it works is not fully understood. Maybe it allows the flies to sidle up to their hosts un-noticed. However, this doesn't explain why it is the males that have the broader, more shieldbug-like, wings.

*Phasia hemiptera* are parasites on shieldbugs. The female fly deposits an egg directly on the unfortunate host. The fly larva develops inside the bug, slowly devouring it from the inside out. For the late spring generation of flies the host is most often the Red-legged Shieldbug (*Pentatoma rufipes*). The summer generation focuses on the Green Shieldbug (*Palomena prasina*) – see picture 3.



Picture 3 The main host of the second brood – the Green Shieldbug

Photo by Ian Cross

The easiest way to find *Phasia* at the moment is if you have patches of flowering mint in your garden. A quick search will reveal the nectaring flies – though you may have to peer closely, as, from a distance, their peculiar appearance isn't always as obvious as you might think.

## **Migrant Bird update**

Roger Hewitt: I managed to catch up with a few migrant birds over the weekend 27th/28<sup>th</sup> August. First was a Northern Wheatear with 15 Yellow Wagtails down at Throop by the cattle sheds. I also found the juvenile Barn Owl out hunting but living dangerously by being out in the day.



Yellow Wagtail Photo by Roger Hewitt

While taking a walk on Turnerspuddle Heath I spotted a female Common Redstart on the fenceline, but as soon as I spotted it, it disappeared. Despite looking for it for over an hour, I did not see it again. There was the first real sign of a movement by the Swallows, Sand Martins and a few House Martins - I saw around 200 hunting insects early one morning in our water meadows. I hope there is more to come than that in the next few weeks.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> September on Turnerspuddle Heath I saw a male Common Redstart. It did sit for 30 seconds before disappearing onto the army land. Unlike last year's photo it was a bit distant for a good shot.

Male Common Redstart Photos by Roger Hewitt

# TAKE CARE DO NOT START FIRE FIRE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Below: Kingfisher at Moreton on 1st September

Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: Not a great shot but pleased to get one at all!



# Field mouse with young Photo by Adrian Middleton



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/60 15 September 2022

Fungal ID Question: Photos submitted by Jaffar Abbas



*Ian Cross*: One of the many species of mushroom in the genus (*Agaricus*) which includes the Field Mushroom, Horse Mushroom any many others.

# Why do we call a butterfly pupa a 'Chrysalis'?



Comma chrysalis showing its brilliant metallic gold and silvery-white spots
Photo by Ian Cross

*Ian Cross*: The pupa or chrysalis is the stage in the development of a butterfly or moth that comes between the caterpillar and the winged adult. In this stage the tissues that form the caterpillar are dissolved into an insect 'soup', then rearranged to form a butterfly or moth.

But why 'chrysalis'? And, for that matter, why does chrysalis only apply to butterflies whilst the equivalent in a moth is called a pupa?

Chrysalis comes from the Greek word 'chrysos' meaning gold. This is in reference to the brilliant, metallic gold or silvery-white spots on many butterfly chrysalises. The comma chrysalis in the picture above shows these quite well (although in some tropical butterflies the effect can be dazzling).

There's lots of speculation as to the reason for these metallic reflections. They mainly have something to do with camouflage: the bright spots may look like beads of dew, reflect the colours of the surroundings or just serve to dazzle and disorientate a predator – though, to me, none of the explanations are totally satisfying.

Interestingly, the old term for lepidopterists – now long out of use – was 'Aurelian'. This comes from the Latin 'aurelia', for a chrysalis which itself derived from 'aurum' meaning gold. Thus it derived for the same reason. (Sometimes I think I would be quite happy to be called an Aurelian.)

The equivalent stage in moths doesn't have these metallic spots, so is referred to as a pupa which comes from the Latin word for a doll – moth pupae tend to be rounded, chubby things.

# **Pied Flycatcher and Spotted Flycatcher**

Roger Hewitt: It was nice to catch up with this female Pied Flycatcher on 9<sup>th</sup> September. I found it upstream from the main road bridge in Briantspuddle, with more Spotted Flycatchers.

What a year the Spotted Flycatchers have had! I have counted more this year than any other year and they are still coming.

The Pied Flycatcher is another bird that breeds in the west of Britain. It's still breeding on Dartmoor, but mainly in Wales. Its migration route in autumn takes it first to Portugal where it stops for around 11 days to feed up. It then goes around the western edge of the Sahara and stops in Senegal or Mauritania for a further feed. Their final flight for their winter takes them to Guinea, Liberia and the Ivory Coast. However, there is still more to be learnt about their migration routes and their ecological requirements.



Spotted Flycatcher (above) and Pied Flycatcher (below) Photos by Roger Hewitt



## **Hornet Robberfly**

Adrian Middleton: Whilst on an excursion on heathland, subject to restoration, I came across this Hornet Robberfly, a very impressive predatory insect of somewhat fearsome appearance. It bears some resemblance to the Hornet itself with its black and yellow markings but whilst one of our biggest flies, it is not harmful to us. It reminded me that Roger Hewitt provided an interesting photo of two mating in an earlier newsletter (2020/109) and there have also been other accounts of the Hornet Hoverfly (see 2021/167 for a feature on Hornet Robberfly ecology and robberflies of Erica Trust Heath). The Robberfly I saw enabled me to take a photo when it landed on a stony track but it soon buzzed off quite noisily, only to re-alight a few yards ahead. It didn't catch anything during my watch, but it was a timely distraction when I had otherwise been looking for reptiles.



Hornet Robberfly Photo by Adrian Middleton

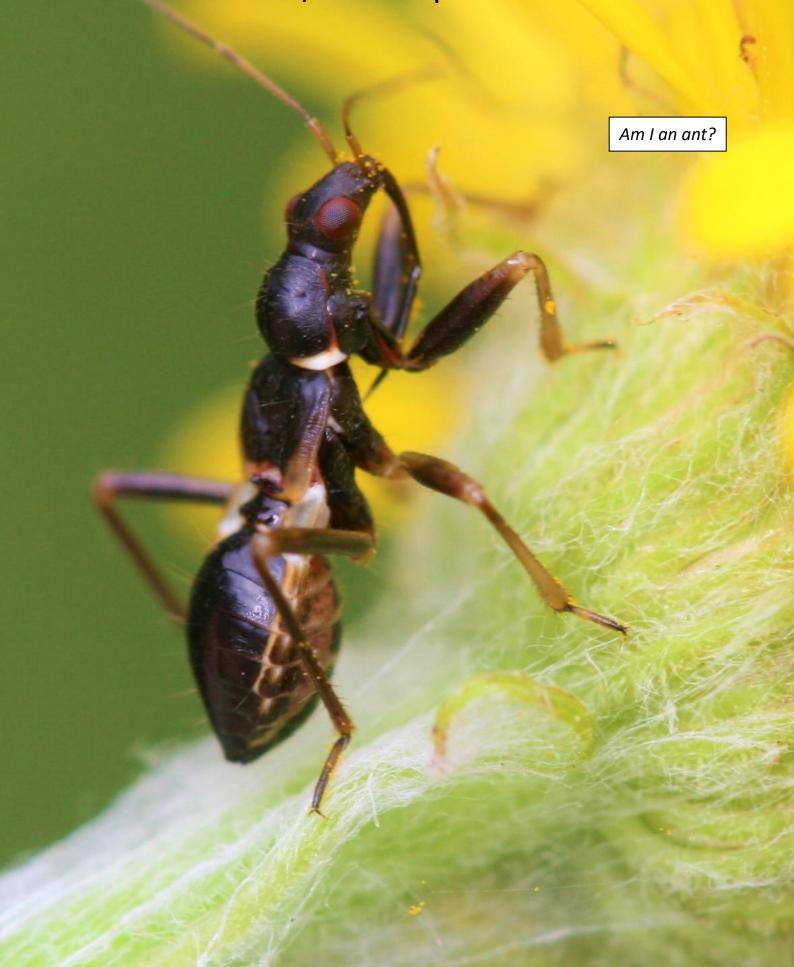
# **Little Egret at Moreton**

Photo by Helen Frost



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/61 16 September 2022



### Am I an ant?

*Ian Cross*: Ants don't always receive good publicity. They have a reputation for biting, stinging, squirting formic acid, or even all three – a reputation that is often well-deserved. If you are an ant, predators generally treat you with a bit of respect and probably give you a wide berth.

Now just imagine, if you were a helpless and harmless insect or spider, wouldn't it be a good idea if you could somehow convince the local bullies that you were an ant. You could put the word out that you didn't want to be pushed around anymore and that you too, wanted to be shown a little respect. It's a hard trick to pull off but it's amazing how many creepy-crawlies are good ant mimics. They don't do it deliberately of course – it's natural selection that has fine-tuned the similarity – but the results are often impressive.

One such creature is frequent in the parish. This is the Ant Damsel Bug (*Himacerus mirmicoides*). It's not the adult bug that achieves the mimicry but the early stage or 'nymph' (see picture below and front cover).



Nymph of Ant Damsel Bug, not an ant but a superb ant mimic

Photo by Ian Cross

Of course, turning a chubby baby bug shape into that of an elegant and leggy ant takes a bit of refinement. Ants have a long, slender waist, that goes in, bulges out in a little bump, then becomes thin again. In bugs the various body parts are all the same width with no narrowing between.

The baby Ant Damsel Bug imitates a narrow waist by having two white patches on either side just behind the hind legs. A pair of crisp white crescents just behind the front legs creates another 'narrowing', that ants have but no bug possesses. Then, to cap it all off, the nymph has a 'kink' in its antennae – just like the sharp bend that is such a feature of ant feelers.

When all this is combined with a glossy, black body the result is a pretty passable copy of a tough ant with attitude.

This oh-so-ingenious bug can be seen widely in our area. I have seen a number in recent days on the Erica Trust Heath but they can even be found in gardens. A good place to look is on yellow flowers of the dandelion family – Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) is always a favourite.

### **ID Question and Photo submitted by Roger Hewitt**

Roger Hewitt: This form of bracket fungi is on my neighbours apple tree. I wondered what the exact name is and whether it is poisonous?



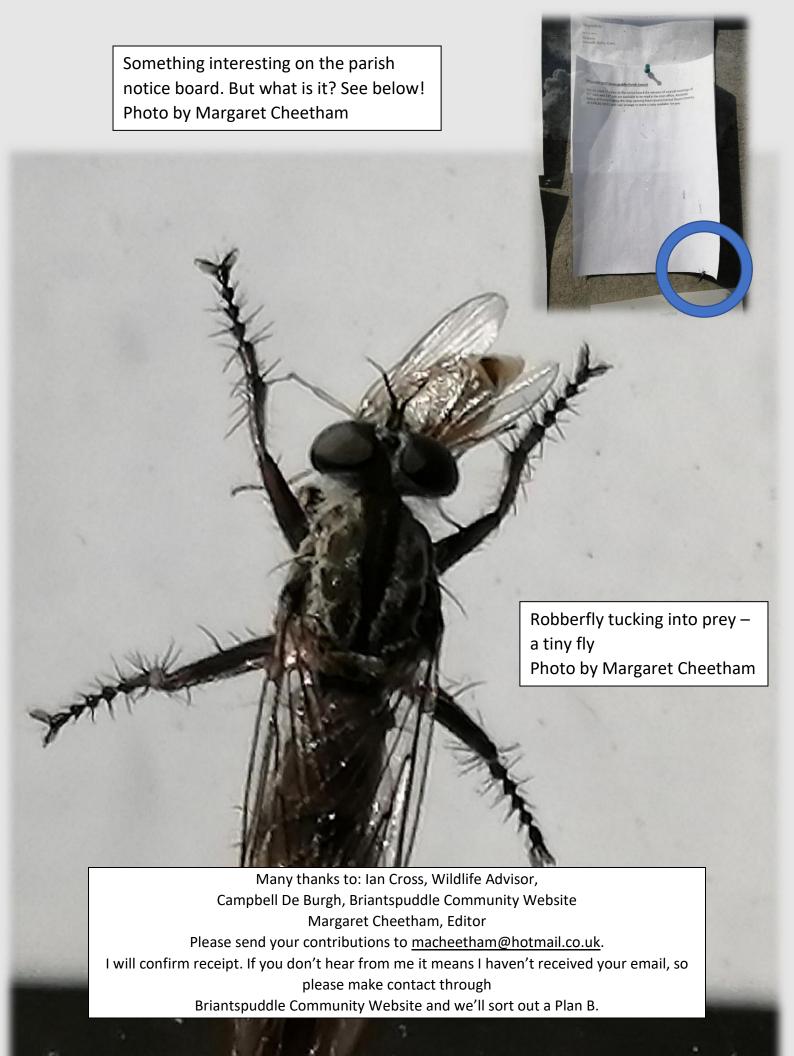
*Ian Cross:* This is the Shaggy Bracket (*Inonotus hispidus*). It's relatively frequent on the trunks of broadleaves, often Ash and Apple trees. Like many brackets it's neither edible nor poisonous - it's too tough and leathery - so no need for concern (except it means the tree is on the way out). Your neighbour's specimen is weeping little clear droplets. This is quite common with the young fruit bodies of several brackets.

### **Pale Tussock Rescue**

Adrian Middleton: Taking a break this week I was checking the pond only to find this caterpillar struggling for survival well beneath the surface of the water. It appeared to have fallen off the nearby overhanging walnut tree. I managed to rescue it and photographed it. A caterpillar yes, but it wasn't a woolly bear (that of the garden tiger moth) but the pristine, if somewhat wet, pink-coloured variety of the Pale Tussock moth, on my woolly pullover.



Rescued and wet Pale Tussock caterpillar on Adrian's Woolly Jumper
Photo by Adrian Middleton



# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/63 3 November 2022



A misty morning on Erica Trust land

Photo by Meriel Ensom

What's Eli been up to during his half-term visit to Affpuddle?

Find out below!

Eli, now aged 6 Photo by Sam Spencer



### A Horsehair Worm

*lain Freeman*: I have never seen one of these before: a horsehair worm. There are hundreds of varieties, and probably more to be discovered. This one was found in a plastic leaf grabber that had been left out in the rain, but apparently it did not get there by itself; it was delivered there by its host.



Horsehair worm on leaf grabber

Photo by Iain Freeman

It is about 20cm long and hardly more than a millimetre in diameter. Some can grow to nearly 2.0m in length. Their life cycle and means of reproduction is weird and astonishing. They are parasitic, but do not seem to kill their host and happily do not parasitise humans, which is a bit of a relief, as I had just eaten an apple that was on the ground next to it.

# Eli returns to Affpuddle

Adrian Middleton: Eli and his family have just made a welcome return to Affpuddle this autumn. Eli is now six. Reptiles still feature prominently in his interests but his knowledge has broadened considerably and he knows lots more about a very wide range of animals, be they lions and tigers or smaller and less well-known ones like pangolins and wolverines. Eli told me his

concerns now include zoos and the role these can play in saving rare and endangered species.



Setting Off Photo by Sam Spencer

The late October weather has been milder than usual if somewhat unreliable but finally we were able to dodge the showers and head off onto the heath in sunshine. As for reptiles, many have now gone into "hibernation" so there was an element of doubt as to which, if any, of these we would find. A smooth snake was top of the agenda.

The common toad a regular acquaintance was missing from its usual haunt and no field mouse appeared. But we soon spotted a large slow worm which was encouraging. On the way we also saw darter dragonflies and Eli later mentioned in passing he'd briefly seen a fluffy caterpillar.



Slow Worm Photo by Sam Spencer

We were soon in for a surprise when we saw a small grass snake, a beautiful green colour with distinctive dark bars on its flanks and yellow-white and black collar markings. Its general smart appearance suggested it had recently sloughed its skin. For a few moments it was possible to photograph it but it soon also demonstrated that well-known grass snake defence, pretending to be dead with mouth open and tongue lolling, before suddenly righting itself

and moving off.





Grass Snake at rest (left) and playing dead (right)

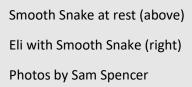
Photos by Sam Spencer

We headed onwards full of anticipation. A further reward came when two large grass snakes were seen lying together, but again quickly disappearing from view. In his various earlier visits, Eli had seen adder and grass snake but not a smooth snake. I began to wonder whether we were heading for the usual negative outcome on this one.

Shortly afterwards though, to everyone's relief, we found a tightly-coiled up smooth snake. Deceptively still, it suddenly moved off at speed and had to be caught by me after a rather undignified scramble (photo of this has been confiscated).

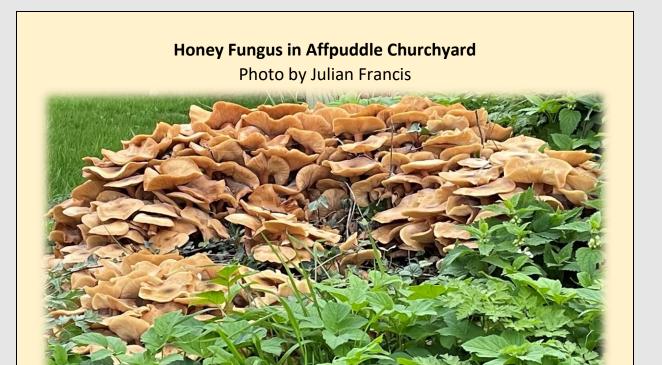
My licence to handle these particular animals to take detailed notes enabled us all to have a good look at it. It was a well-behaved adult male showing typical markings, a new individual for me. Eli was able to hold it briefly before we released it where we had found it. Lacking keels on its scales results in the smoothness which gives it its name, something which Eli found particularly appealing.







We were all feeling good, but it was time for Emma our patient driver to take us home. Thank you Sam for your photographs too. We were already looking forward to our next outing. Eli hopes the toad, that old acquaintance, will be waiting for us, along with lots of other special creatures.



# Last of the Summer Wine – an exceptional October?

*Ian Cross*: According to the Met Office, October 2022 has gone down in the meteorological record books as the fourth warmest ever in England. Certainly, there can be no doubt that it has produced a flurry of extreme late records for various wildlife.

Most reptiles are thinking of entering hibernation around this time of year: but a Smooth Snake on Black Hill on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, a Common Lizard on the 7<sup>th</sup> at Oakers Bog and a Slow-worm on the 20<sup>th</sup> showed that some were willing to make flexible plans.

Dragonflies have been a little disappointing. Common Darter and Southern Hawker are still very active but it is quite normal for these two species to fly at this time of year, and even well into November. A unexpected surprise was a female Golden-ringed Dragonfly on Bryants Puddle Heath on the 13<sup>th</sup> October.

This proved to be my latest ever record for what is normally a high summer species. She had to be rescued from a watery grave, having been beaten down onto the surface of a pond by an overenthusiastic male Southern Hawker. Whether he was preying on her, or it was a case of mistaken identity I will never know.

Despite the mild weather butterflies haven't been particularly prominent. Though warm, the days have perhaps been just a little too blustery and showery with few totally calm and unbroken sunny spells.

Butterflies that hibernate as adults are absolutely capricious and unpredictable in their appearance at this time of year. Any still, sunny day will draw them out of their winter sleep for a quick flight round the neighbourhood. For this reason I was unsurprised to record a Peacock making a quick sortie from its hideaway in a clump of ivy. The inevitable Small Tortoiseshell was found battering itself against an upstairs window. As regularly as clockwork they hibernate in the cooler, gloomier depths of our house every autumn. And just as predictably, they wake prematurely when the central heating goes on.

I haven't even bothered to record the Red Admirals I see, they are such a feature of the autumn and early winter. However, a male Brimstone on the 8<sup>th</sup> was a welcome surprise.

It's the non-hibernating butterflies that really let you know how the climate is affecting butterfly behaviour. It's been a pretty average year for Clouded Yellows. Unfortunately, the parish hasn't had a field of fodder Lucerne to hold their attention this year, so there hasn't been a 'go-to' place to find them. The last I saw was a male on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October.

A warm summer regularly allows the Small Copper to squeeze in a third brood in early October, so one seen on Bovington Heath on the 9<sup>th</sup> is quite normal. Likewise, the Small White frequently produces third broods these days, so I was a little disappointed to see remarkably few – my last being on Kite Hill on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

Most surprises this month were supplied by the browns. A male Meadow Brown seen on the  $8^{th}$  was unusually late (though not exceptionally so – I've

seen later ones) so perhaps this was a portent of things to come. My last Speckled Wood was a tattered example seen on Black Hill on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Checking my records, this is the latest I've ever seen, so I now have fingers crossed for my first ever November Speckled Wood.

The big story has been the Wall butterfly. This species is believed to manage a small third brood in hot years. I've seen a few this October which suggests 2022 has been one such year. Above all, a male seen on the 20<sup>th</sup> October on Black Hill is the latest I've ever seen by some margin.

# Cauliflower Fungus (Sparassis crispa)

Photo by Patrick Grove-White

Patrick Grove-White: Here is a photo of a Cauliflower Fungus (Sparassis crispa) about 8 inches across, growing at the foot of one of my Douglas Firs. I think it is still expanding, and they can reach about 12 inches. My expert friend tells me it's edible, though I've never tried it!



# Date for your diaries

### Briantspuddle Village Hall talk: 17 November 2022

Angie Talbot: Mike Menzies and I are jointly running a talk on the Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm in Briantspuddle Village Hall as part of Mike's Winter Series of Talks.

You may already be aware of the exciting rewilding project being run by the Dorset Wildlife Trust that is underway at Bere Regis to help tackle the climate crises, to increase biodiversity and look at how changes in farming practices can help this to happen.

Come along to find out more from Sebb Haggett of DWT who will explain what is going on, what progress has already been made, and will answer any questions you may have.

Tickets are available now from Angie Talbot on 01929 472483, or from the Saturday Coffee Shop 10am till 12 noon.

**Fly Agaric** Photo by Meriel Ensom



# **Fly Agaric** Photo by Meriel Ensom

*Meriel Ensom*: I've noticed it's a good year for Fly Agaric (and a lot of other fungi).



### **Erica Trust land updates**

Lesley Haskins: Three of the four tree work sites that we hoped to tackle this season have now been done, namely:

- 1 The clear-fell east of the footpath at Hollow Woods to restore heathland. The broadleaved woodland fringe will be encouraged to thicken up.
- The removal of the remaining hemlocks and pollarding of the limes at the bottom of Smokeham Bottom. Very much looking forward to seeing the limes respond to their new environment.
- 3 The removal of Douglas fir alongside the Affpuddle Road. Native broadleaved woodland will be encouraged in its place.

Work on another hazel coupe close to the Affpuddle Road will be taking place during this winter.

However, the proposed thinning of the exotic conifers between Allotments Plantation and Chapel Cottage will be held over for another year.

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2022/64 Christmas Edition 2022



Shaggy Inkcaps Photo by Trevor Poole

*Trevor Poole*: These have come up out of the blue in my field boundary just east of the bus shelter. Are they "Shaggy Inkcaps?"

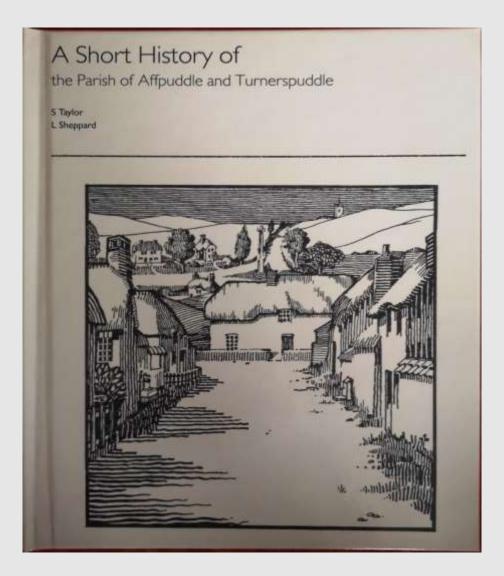
*Ian Cross*: Yes, for some reason the verges near the crossroads are a regular site for this species.



Shaggy Inkcaps Photo by Trevor Poole

### The Perfect Gift: A New Publication about the Parish

Unless you're a male, you'll have completed your Christmas shopping. But how about a New Year present?



Lesley Haskins: Ian Cross is likely to be too modest to advertise the fact that he has written a brilliant precis of the wildlife of the Parish within the delightful and just published book A Short History of the Parish of Affpuddle and Turnespuddle by Sue Taylor and Leonora Sheppard. He helpfully covers all our key habitats, from aquatic rivers and streams, treed old woodlands and modern plantations, to the open grasslands and heathlands, describing where they are found and what plants and animals they support. So helpful for

gaining an understanding of the remarkable range of wildlife habitats and species of our Parish. A Christmas gift must!

lan describes the heathlands as our 'finest' habitat and is of course the one which has been most reduced in recent times. The Erica Trust has been pleased to put back just a little bit more of that lost heathland this year by the removal of the Monterey Pines and Douglas Fir from the eastern half of 'Hollow Woods' to link with the heathland already cared for by Henry Hogger. The wonderful air photograph in Sue and Leonora's book shows how this area (together with so much of the surrounding land) was totally open in the 1930s before it was planted by the Debenham Estate as part of their timber production enterprise



Affpuddle Parish in the 1930s prior to tree planting

That matured timber has now gone to market (as has all the timber we have cropped from the old Estate land of course), just as the Estate had intended that one day it would.

Removing accumulated brash after the felling is essential for heathland to return as it needs nutrient poor conditions. With that brash now largely gone nature will do the rest.

Along the bottom of the slope and the eastern margin, where a narrow strip of ancient woodland still survives, we will encourage a wider band of native broadleaves to develop. Some of the oak seedlings donated by villagers have already found a home there. More are always welcome.

I am reproducing below the final paragraph of my own small contribution to Sue and Leonora's book which helps I hope to put this, and indeed our wider work with the old Estate landholding in the longer term context of the vegetational history of our exceptional parish.

So the Estate land has witnessed a full circle from old woodland and heath to 'commercial woodland' and largely back again to wood and heath. It has done the job of providing a substantial timber crop, which was seen, in the days when it was planted, as the priority of providing home produced timber. But priorities change over time and restoration of rare and important biodiversity now also receives high recognition - especially of habitats such as ancient woodland and heathland. And the most modern priority of carbon sequestration is also very much met, for it is often overlooked that undisturbed open habitats, including heathlands, are themselves also important stores of carbon.

# **Affpuddle Updates**

Adrian Middleton: With wet weather on the cards once again I have been taking advantage of the remaining mild days before accepting winter is on its way. But first it has been time to review my garden butterfly sightings for this year. Essentially these have been disappointing. The seventeen species seen is about average whilst actual total numbers have been very low. There were three irregular visitors i.e. Wall Brown, Common Blue and Large Skipper which were just about the only compensation.

I have also been reading, with interest, newsletter accounts of latest sightings where wildlife of various sorts, has taken advantage of the very mild spell. A bit unusual for me has been a Spotted Flycatcher, on November 7th, sitting on the mains electric cable leading to the house, like last year's bird, but very much later in the season.

So this November (more particularly the 13th and 14th) I have been compelled to venture out onto our heathland to seek out a reptile or two. The silence round and about would have been deafening but for the distant sounds of revving engines. Anyway in effect I was retracing the steps of young Eli, where the going got tough, and was pleasantly surprised to find this large adult Grass Snake (probably female) where once we had seen an Adder. The keels on the body scales show well but the yellow or white collar is almost missing on this individual with the relevant scales mostly taking on a brownish colour whilst the adjoining black part is more or less the norm. You can just see the forked tongue as well.



Grass Snake Photo by Adrian Middleton

Moving on, still retracing our footsteps, continued to be rewarding with further Grass Snake and Smooth Snake and likely as not, that elusive toad. I shall be passing the message on.

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### Birds from the window

Adrian Middleton: Simply looking round and about from the house leading up to Christmas there has been some mild open weather moving on to frosts and then strong winds and rain and like as not one or other will be back again.

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House sparrows and chaffinches along with collared doves and woodpigeons have predominated alongside blackbirds, the common crow family members and a few starlings.

The first surprise was a spotted flycatcher on an electric cable in early November albeit not for long, heading south no doubt. Kestrel and buzzard on electricity poles followed (poles apart however!) with other village birds which should be common but not recently seen at home including great-spotted woodpecker and nuthatch on peanuts with the usual familiar tits, a few goldfinches on niger seed and a lone greenfinch and song thrush nearby. Then a fieldfare came along for several days, sharing a hawthorn with two or three redwings as they passed through. Most recently two male blackcaps were investigating the green cover of leycesteria with wren, hedge sparrow and of course robin.

Birds over the flooded water meadows have included mute swans, grey heron, some 25 – 30 Canada geese, several mallard, little egret, cormorant, various gulls and a raven flying overhead.

# **Robin on tree trunk** Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost:
Well this was a new one for me - on a frosty morning on 12 December I twice saw different robins flying onto the flat trunk of a pine tree, presumably trying to get insects.



### **Bird Updates by Roger Hewitt**

### **November**



Black Redstart by one of the barns at East Farm, Turnerspuddle
Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: I saw at least four Firecrest at different sites in November, and on 22nd November I found another Pintail Duck in Throop meadows. As the water levels are quite high now, it stayed for two days, then moved on. I'm now walking around the meadows every day hoping for something new!

On passing East Farm, Turnerspuddle on 23rd November, I noticed a bird up on the barn roof, and yes, it was a Black Redstart. So I had a wander on the footpath around the farm, looking up every alleyway I could, and I spotted two more. At one point they were altogether – so definitely three birds.

# **Early December**



Two Shoveler ducks on the left and Mallards on the right
Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: Into December, and a walk around West Farm Affpuddle produced a few Yellowhammers and Lapwings, but best was a flock of 40 Skylarks. However, there were no big Linnet flocks.

A walk along Briantspuddle Heath produced just a few Crossbills and there were also a few on Erica Trust land. A look on the Briantspuddle fishing lake produced eight Wigeon, eight Little Grebes and six Mandarin ducks. Also here I saw a flock of 13 Shoveler Ducks. I can't remember seeing them here before. They are commuting between here and the water meadows to feed.

With the cold weather starting to bite, more and more birds were turning up on the flooded meadow at Throop, with a few Lapwings. I just love to see these and their pee-wit calls bring back childhood memories.

Over four days, Snipe numbers increased daily, and on 16th December I counted 105. I think there may have been more than that - they were all over the field and in the open. Just a super fantastic sight.

### New for the Parish...

Roger Hewitt: I have been waiting a long time now for a new bird for the parish list, and it turned up on 12 December in the form of a Black-tailed Godwit. Some come from the Iceland area and some from other parts of Europe, and they breed in Tundra and estuaries. We started off with one bird and by 15th December we had 16. Sadly, those 16 were only present for the one day but the odd one comes back some days.



Above: Black-tailed Godwits at Throop Water Meadows
Below: Two Black-tailed Godwits with six Snipe in the foreground
at Throop Water Meadows. Photos by Roger Hewitt



We get a lot of wintering Black-tailed Godwits around Poole Harbour. They can also be seen at Lodmoor, along the footpath at times. But here in the parish

they stayed out in the middle of the meadow so no perfect photos. Now they have found us it will be interesting to see if they continue to come and feed here. I do not think they will be short of water!

# **Cattle Egrets at Throop Farm**

Roger Hewitt: I took a look at Throop Farm and saw our first Cattle Egrets for some time. They were with the cattle, but just the one day.



Above and Below: Cattle Egrets at Throop Farm Photos by Roger Hewitt



### **Waddock Cross Watercress Farm**

Roger Hewitt: On 16th December I saw four Lapwings and three Green Sandpipers. Snipe had also moved in here – I counted 17 of them, but there were possibly more hidden in the watercress. I also saw more than 30 Meadow Pipits, three Grey Wagtails, 12 Pied Wagtails, six Blackbirds and two Song Thrushes. I have seen quite a lot of Song Thrushes around our area, and also large numbers of Pied Wagtails all over the water meadows.



Above: Lapwing at Waddock Cross Photo by Roger Hewitt Below: Green Sandpiper at Waddock Cross Photo by Roger Hewitt





Common Snipe at Waddock Cross Photo by Roger Hewitt



### Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Robin in snow Photo by Helen Frost

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
Please send your contributions to <a href="mailto:macheetham@hotmail.co.uk">macheetham@hotmail.co.uk</a>.
I will confirm receipt. If you don't hear from me it means I haven't received your email, so please make contact through
Briantspuddle Community Website and we'll sort out a Plan B.