# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/1 New Year Edition 2023



Above: Grey Squirrel Photo by Adrian Middleton
Below: One Wood Pigeon and eight Collared Doves on the lawn
Photo by Adrian Middleton



### **Butterfly Update for 2022**

Roger Hewitt: You would have thought with all that very hot sunny weather we had, I would be saying "what a great year for our butterflies". But I do not think it was. I think the spring butterflies faired okay, but for the summer ones it got a bit too hot. To record the numbers meant being out early, because by early afternoon they were looking for the shade out of the sun. The vegetation and food plants all dried up and the caterpillars probably did not make it through their circle. This we will find out next year when we do our surveys to see what the numbers are.

According to *Butterfly Conservation*, following the drought in 1976 it took eight years for most of the butterflies to recover their numbers. Let's hope it will not be that long this time.

I managed to spot 33 species this year, but only Silver-studded Blue, Grayling and Speckled Wood had a good year. Silver-studded Blue bred well, and I recorded good numbers, but their season was short due to the heat. Grayling and Speckled Wood went on well to the autumn.



Small Copper Photo by Roger Hewitt

The following butterflies did okay, but not in the numbers I would normally see: Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Ringlet, Large Skipper, Small Skipper, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Common Blue, Red Admiral, Comma, Gatekeeper, Green-veined White, Large White, Small White, Small Copper, Peacock, Holly Blue, Brimstone, Small Heath, Silver-washed Fritillary, Purple Hairstreak and Orange Tip.

These other few butterflies are only seen in small numbers but numbers looked to be about the same as other years but I do worry that some of these might just disappear. They are: Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Brown Argus, Wall Brown, Essex Skipper, Small Blue and Clouded Yellow.

Every year one Butterfly or another catches the weather wrong for breeding but they generally bounce back. Some even catch the weather right for breeding and have a good year.



Painted Lady Photo by Roger Hewitt

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### **Butterfly Numbers: the national picture**

Butterfly Conservation has not yet published its annual report. However, a number of newspapers and websites have reported concerns, for example:

... experts are worried the UK's population of butterflies and day-flying moths is still in decline, with wildlife charity Butterfly Conservation describing the numbers as "worryingly low".

Dr Richard Fox, head of science for Butterfly Conservation, said: "We might have expected this summer to have been a much better one for butterflies given the good weather we experienced in many parts of the UK.

"The fact that more butterflies weren't seen is concerning and it's clear that much more needs to be done to protect and restore habitats to aid nature recovery.

"The sun could shine for days on end, but we still won't see more butterflies unless there is habitat for them to thrive in."

https://news.sky.com/story/butterfly-numbers-worryingly-low-despite-good-weather-12714097

## **Wasp Activity and Difficulties in Identification**

Adrian Middleton: Earlier in the summer I had noticed wasp activity high up on the eaves of the house but left them well alone until the other day a visitor told me much to his consternation that dozens of wasps were flying round the lights in the loft where he was working. To his credit he carried on until the job was done and I was once again able to make sure the hatch was properly closed and the rest of the house secured from any invasions from these particular guests.

A few days later in sunshine which had cleared an early frost, I noticed lots of wasps feeding on variegated ivy growing on the southern aspect of the house.

The insects' general appearance reminded me of the loft ones, but what species were they? I could only think of the Common Wasp and the European (German) Wasp but was unable to make their identity match one or other of these. I took several photos of them (including some that had died naturally) and a friend suggested these were examples of the Tree Wasp (*Dolichovespula sylvestris*), a species which had never crossed my mind. I now understand differentiating these various species is not as straight-forward as one might think. Even the anchor-like mark, a regular feature on the face of the Common Wasp can occasionally occur in other wasp species. On close examination I also found that at least the bands on the head and the thorax and abdomen markings seemed to fit well with my friend's identification.





Above left - Showing general size of wasp. Photo by Adrian Middleton Above right - Wasps on ivy flowers. Photo by Adrian Middleton





Above left: Showing abdominal and thoracic markings.

Photo by Adrian Middleton

Above right: Showing face marks. Photo by Adrian Middleton

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The life span of most of these wasps might well have been prolonged by the very mild weather we have been having. I shall continue to keep an eye on them and see how they are getting on as we move on into winter.

### **Identification: Social Wasps in Autumn**

*Ian Cross*: Adrian's article has highlighted some interesting issues concerning late autumnal wasps.

The first thing that struck me when I saw Adrian's photos, was that they were all of male wasps. At a stroke this explains the timing of these individuals and the identification problems he encountered.

Male wasps and young queens are produced in greatest numbers towards the end of the colony's life cycle. These wasps are not particularly late – they're exactly when you would expect males to peak.



Picture 1: Common Wasp worker face – the spot in the middle is supposed to resemble an anchor. Photo by Ian Cross.

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It also accounts for the misidentification as tree wasps. Tree wasps (*Dolichovespula*) tend to be larger and have slender faces compared with *Vespula* wasps. But male wasps are also generally larger and slimmer than the workers. So, if you are unfamiliar with the males, it's easy to think you have found something different.

Which brings me to the identity of these specimens. They are all males of the German Wasp (*Vespula germanica*). Many insect books tend to illustrate the workers of social wasps and rely very much on facial markings for ID. Typical workers of the Common Wasp (*Vespula vulgaris*) have a mark on the face that looks a little like an anchor (picture 1).



Picture 2: German Wasp worker face - showing the classic three spots

Photo by Ian Cross

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For the German Wasp this is replaced by a triangle of three spots (picture 2). However, it must be stressed that this feature varies considerably (picture 3) and should **never be relied on for identification**. For critical identification other characters need to be examined.

Unfortunately, males don't look quite like the workers and markings are very unreliable. To be absolutely sure of identity the genitalia need to be examined.



Picture 3: German Wasp worker face – a variation on the theme Photo by Ian Cross

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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#### **Bambi's Friend**

*Nick Gore*: There are a number of species of wildlife that one hopes to see in their natural habitat in a lifetime. Dolphins, whales, Golden Eagles, I could name quite a few, but one in particular for me is the otter. I saw one once on the River Dart in Devon at some distance but living and working by the Piddle I always held a hope that I might see one on my home patch, at least definitive evidence that they are here.

Well, after 39 years in Affpuddle I finally got that evidence!

Every year at West Farm we always seem to end up with a calf from our suckler herd that requires feeding with milk replacer and this year is no exception. Invariably the calf is called "Bambi" and these motherless calves live in a pen with access to the field behind the calf house.

The current Bambi is now over 4 months old and still being fed milk. To Roger Prideaux's surprise on the 4th January as he went to feed Bambi first thing in the morning he discovered an Otter curled up in the pen with the calf.

Naturally this caused some excitement with everyone on the farm, particularly what course of action, if any at all, should be taken. An Otter rescue centre was contacted and as the Otter appeared uninjured and in good condition it was thought that it would eventually leave of its own accord. We all kept out of the way apart from the opportunity to take a few photographs and place a plate full of dog food nearby, which it thoroughly demolished! It did not take any notice of Bambi moving in and out of the pen and seemed quite happy to stay as I took my photos.

By the end of the day it moved out of the calf pen and set up home in one of the old chicken houses and the following morning was nowhere to be seen. With the Piddle in full flood, I would imagine that the Otter's holts and couches (an area above ground where they lie up) would be all underwater and a nice warm calf house nearby would seem an ideal place to stay for a while.



Otter at West Farm, Affpuddle. Photos by Nick Gore.





Otter at West Farm, Affpuddle.
Photo by Nick Gore.

Roger and Christine Hewitt: On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023, on the way home from Dorchester, Christine and I decided to have a look around Southover and come back through Affpuddle. It had been raining all morning and the road at Southover end was well flooded for about 300 metres. It was a bit of a job to see where the road was.

We were just about halfway to Affpuddle when I spotted a dark lump on the roadside up ahead. Then it moved, and we could see it was an otter right on the edge of the road. We stopped the car and the otter just walked towards us, and came right alongside the car.

Christine opened the door and was eye to eye with the otter. For a brief second she thought it was going to jump into the car, but it walked on past the car and disappeared behind us. What an experience, and what a time to have no camera with us.

Still, we will not forget that one.

### Semi-slugs

*Ian Cross*: Semi-slugs must feature amongst the commonest creatures that you have never heard of! Though, if you have a moderately average garden with relatively fertile soil and good populations of earthworms – i.e. just about every garden in the parish – you will be sharing it with these bizarre creatures.

So what are semi-slugs? Sounds like something you might find when you have been preparing the vegetable beds and have been enthusiastically slicing through the soil with a spade. But no, a semi-slug is not half a slug you've just chopped in two. Instead they represent the half-way stage you find between being a snail and becoming a slug.

This is weird. Shells are so useful, yet no sooner had they evolved, it seems that various groups of snails, scattered randomly around the evolutionary tree, couldn't wait to lose them again.



Picture 1: Atlantic Shelled Slug – the shell perches awkwardly at the very end of the body. Photo by Ian Cross

This creature is the Atlantic Shelled Slug, Golden Shelled Slug or Mauge's Slug (*Testacella maugei* - picture 1). It's a predator of earthworms and therefore spends most of its life burrowing through the soil. Which is why you have never seen one. They're actually relatively common but I've only ever seen two in the 23 years we have lived in Briantspuddle.

A semi-slug carries what little remains of a shell – a little flat, translucent oval (picture 2) – perched at a jaunty angle right at the very tip of the tail. It doesn't seem to serve any useful purpose whatsoever and there is no way the slug could ever withdraw inside.



Picture 2: The shell is thin and shallow – nowhere to hide here!

Photo by Ian Cross

Which begs the question – if shells are such good protection, why on earth get rid of them? There are two good reasons. Firstly, shells take a lot of calcium to make, which rather restricts where you can live if you're a mollusc. Secondly, if

the burrowing lifestyle suits you or you simply need to squeeze into narrow crevices they do tend to get in the way.

Which is why so many different groups of snails have decided to dispense with them. Even if some of them haven't quite gone all the way yet!

### Noah's Pheasants!

Helen Frost: I'm sure we are all fed up with this rain - I caught these pheasants at Throop who were wondering what had happened to their fields!



Pheasants in Throop Photo by Helen Frost



Female Reed Bunting in Throop Photo by Helen Frost Peregrine (in poor light) spotted at Oakers Wood. Photo by Helen Frost



### Wintering Blackcaps

Roger Hewitt: I have noticed the number of Blackcaps over-wintering around our parish are slowly increasing each year. Not in big numbers - just a few.



Female Blackcap. Photo Roger Hewitt.

Adrian Middleton reported some in his garden, and I have male and female in my garden for a while now. Our breeding Blackcaps would normally migrate in September to south west Spain and North Africa.

It's been known for some time now that most of the Blackcaps that overwinter here come from central Europe, mainly southern Germany, where the weather is a lot colder than here. Also researchers have noticed that some Blackcaps from southern Europe are now coming north in winter. How do they know that? Well, mostly by bird ringing captures, but they do not understand why birds from warmer areas would want to travel north. It's possibly food related.

Not everyone agrees with bird ringing but it does give us a lot of valuable information. Some of our summer breeding Blackcaps do stay and over-winter, but only six birds with rings have been caught to prove it. I suspect it may be a few more than that now.

As well as Blackcaps, the Chiffchaff overwinters in good numbers now. I wonder what will be the next bird to over-winter?



Male Blackcap. Photo by Roger Hewitt.

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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## Pine Cone Toadstools By Ian Cross



Picture 1 - Pine-cone Bonnet sprouting from the side of a fallen cone Photo by Ian Cross

*Ian Cross:* Many fungi have evolved to live on dead or dying wood. Pine cones are essentially woody, so it shouldn't be surprising that cones sometimes host fungi. What is interesting though, are a small, select group of toadstools that are **only** found sprouting from pine cones.

We have a least two species of these pine cone specialists in the parish. One of these is the Pine-cone Bonnet *Mycena seynii*. This is a small, delicate pink-flushed toadstool (picture 1). If it wasn't for its unusual habitat this would be an unremarkable, easily-overlooked fungus. If you look under the cap, you find it sports a circle of fine gills radiating from the stem like spokes on a wheel (picture 2). This is the usual arrangement for most mushrooms and toadstools and is the same as all its close relatives in the mighty genus *Mycena*.



Picture 2 - Under its cap, the Pine-cone Bonnet has a standard gill arrangement

Photo by Ian Cross

A personal favourite of mine is the Earpick Fungus *Auriscalpium vulgare* (picture 3). This is a small, brown toadstool that would barely be noticed if it wasn't for its habit of growing on pine cones (picture 4). When you look under the cap things start to get seriously peculiar. Instead of gills like most other toadstools, the Earpick bears a dense layer of spines (picture 5). This combination of growing on pine cones and having spines instead of gills makes the Earpick absolutely unmistakeable.

Despite this, it does seem to be rarely recorded. I personally find it tricky to find and I suspect it is overlooked rather than genuinely rare.

A lot of fungus websites tie themselves in knots trying to explain how this toadstool gets its name. My own theory is that the cap is slightly kidneyshaped with the stem attached off-centre. You can get an idea of this in picture 5. From certain angles this gives the impression of a small ear impaled on a short stick – the "earpick" in question.



Picture 3 - Earpick Fungus.

Photo by Ian Cross.



Picture 4 - Earpick Fungus on a Scots Pine cone, the favourite host Photos by Ian Cross

Picture 5 - Under the cap, the Earpick has no gills, but shows an impressive battery of spines.



### **Bird Updates by Roger Hewitt**

Roger Hewitt: I had a walk around Gully Lane on the morning of 23 January and spotted two Firecrests, but nothing new in the meadows. So midafternoon I thought I would re-check Throop meadows, and to my surprise a Great White Egret flew over my head and landed in the meadow by Gully Lane. But guess what? I didn't have my camera with me.

The next day, I looked again but it had moved on. I continued my walk and found two Wigeon in the flooded field by Moor Lane, and this time had the camera with me.

I also spotted another Firecrest on Erica Trust Land, in the holly just up the footpath from the Hollow end. It's the best time of year to spot these delightful little birds.



Wigeon Photo by Roger Hewitt

### Feedback from Newsletter 2023/2

Vivi Armitage: What a lovely edition of the magazine. Very sadly I have to add something to the otter story. At the end of December, I passed a dead otter on the side of the road at Burlston just after the bend. I was so surprised that I went back to check that it wasn't a mink. Someone removed it the following day so I hope they notified the Otter Trust. I wonder if it had been hand reared so therefore not afraid of people and cars.

# Who's looking at who? Sika at Affpuddle Photo by Helen Frost



## **An Interesting Phenomenon...**

Helen Frost: An interesting phenomenon I thought - I am no scientist but presumably the water in the ground was pushed up out of the ground and formed the ice curls



Photo by Helen Frost

*Ian Cross*: This bizarre phenomenon was first mentioned and photographed in the newsletter in February 2021 (edition 2021/33).

The 17<sup>th</sup> of January this year produced absolutely ideal conditions for production of these "ice horns", when several days of heavy rain that left the ground totally saturated were followed by the first morning of intense frost.

I found them right across the parish from Black Hill to Pallington Heath: wherever there was open, gravelly terrain. In places there were over a hundred per square metre and I estimate there must have been several millions across the parish.

They form on pebbles and small stones of a particular geology. As the ice forms on the exposed surface, it builds up from below by moisture wicking through the stones themselves. Therefore, they don't form in bone dry periods but depend on just the right combination of dampness and frost.

#### "Ice Horns"

Excerpt from Edition 2021/33

Ian Cross: I wonder if anyone has an explanation for this peculiar phenomenon. I call them "Ice Horns" but I don't know if there is a technical term.



"Ice Horn" Photo by Ian Cross

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/04 16 March 2023



The Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*) on Crocus Photo by Chrissie Garside

*Ian Cross*: This is a queen of the Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*) on Crocus. Overall, this has been a late spring for bumblebees with only two species seen to date (15th March).

### Why do we use capital letters for proper names?

*Ian Cross*: I can definitely identify the above photo as an <u>Early Bumblebee</u>, but my experience (comparing to previous years' observations) means I can definitely say it wasn't an <u>early bumblebee</u>.

### A few 2023 Spring firsts:

20 Jan	1 <sup>st</sup> bumblebee (queen Buff-tailed Bumblebee)
31 Jan	1 <sup>st</sup> Chiffchaff song
5 Feb	1 <sup>st</sup> Frog spawn
7 Feb	1 <sup>st</sup> Dartford Warbler song
14 Feb	1 <sup>st</sup> Peacock butterfly & 1 <sup>st</sup> Brimstone
19 Feb	1 <sup>st</sup> Red Admiral, 1 <sup>st</sup> Wood Ants massing on nest
21 Feb	1 <sup>st</sup> Toad spawn
2 March	1 <sup>st</sup> Small Tortoiseshell
3 March	1 <sup>st</sup> Common Lizard
16 March	1 <sup>st</sup> Blackcap song

Has anyone observed any of the above earlier?

# Current Forestry England Heathland Restoration at Affpuddle (Marl Pits Wood)

Adrian Middleton: Earlier this week Kasia Robins and I met Mark Warn BEM Forestry England Wildlife Ranger, who kindly gave of his time and knowledge to discuss in some detail the current FE maintenance work in Affpuddle. Fairly recently Mark had carefully outlined this programme in one of our wildlife newsletters.

This work has involved mainly felling of mature conifers along with birch, The intended outcome is to increase the existing extent of heath along the ride edge and looking ahead, the development of a mosaic of open heath and mixed woodland on the adjoining slopes. Bramble stands and trees with honeysuckle growth will be retained. There are ultimate plans too for the introduction of off-track wet scrapes to try and give the waterborne species another option besides the ditches.

It is also worth recalling the other restoration of heathland on Pallington Clump (about 4.5 hectares) and elsewhere at Affpuddle (10 .6 hectares).

This welcome opportunity to meet up reminded me of my time spent enjoying walks in this area over the last forty years up to the present date: something which I know many other people share with me. During this period I can recall seeing birds including Nightjars and Stonechats, reptiles such as Grass Snakes and Adders and amphibians including the Palmate Newt, many butterflies including Silver-washed Fritillaries, White Admirals<sup>1</sup> and Graylings and a number of dragonfly species. It is a long list.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The White Admiral sightings were pre 2000 and mainly 1980-1990 and up to 1999 but not since. The map ref SY799921. Over a several 100 yards stretch along the FE vehicle track edge on bramble flowers in sunny summer weather.



Male Palmate Newt near garden pond in Affpuddle, showing the characteristic filament at the tip of the tail and the black webbing on the hind feet.

Photo by Adrian Middleton

We discussed the maintenance work of the last few months in this area including the felling and stacking of conifers along the vehicle track and

adjoining ditch. Mark mentioned that the ditch developed over time as part of the maintenance work for the vehicle track and subsequently palmate newts have taken advantage of it. At our visit we saw good numbers of Palmate Newts in some stretches of the water in this ditch: many were in more open stretches of water but some were also using water where a comparatively small number of logs unavoidably had to be stacked once the other drier side of the track had been used up. All timber stacks had to be adjacent to the track for safe and effective removal.

Mark explained that every effort will be made to remove the timber from the ditch as soon as possible, in the near future. Unfortunately the value of this particular product will mean it is not as desirable as the other stacks. Whilst the Forestry England Direct Production Team are in regular contact with the customer, the removal of this particular timber will be dependent on the customer involved.

There are a lot of inter-active procedures in this on-going project which I believe will benefit, safeguard and enhance the wide variety of wildlife to be found here.

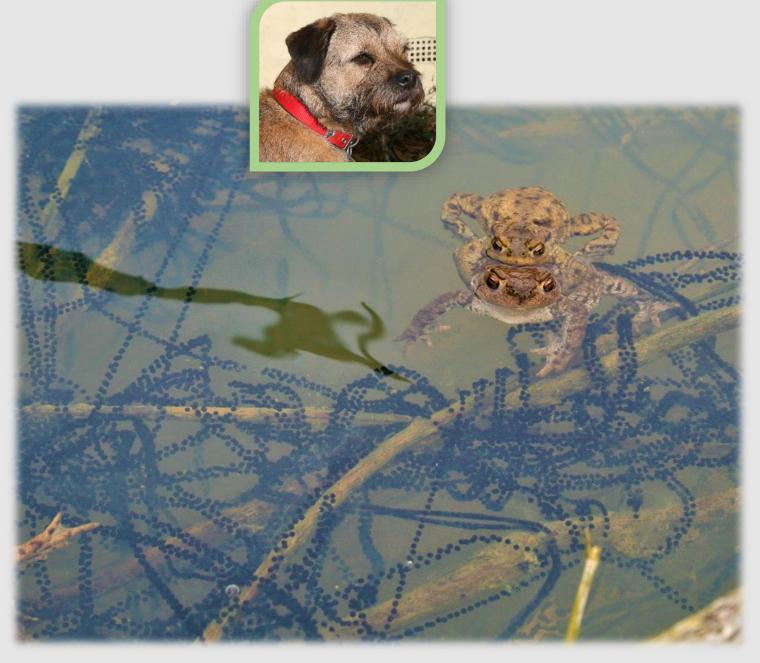
*Ian Cross*: Despite the logs, the pond Adrian describes has a good population of Palmate Newts. Frogs and Toads have also spawned there in the past. The toads spawned this year but the frogs have been displaced.

## More on Marl Pits Wood..... Toads mating in late February

Ian Cross: Lots of frog spawn everywhere at the moment. So, I stopped by at a trackside pool in Marl Pits wood with "the bears" (two border terriers) to see what was about. A few pairs of toads in amplexus were visible. One of these was a 'trio' with another male grasping the female from underneath. As this can sometimes be quite uncomfortable, or even dangerous, for the female I decided to remove him.

The dogs were intrigued as I fished the toads out and began the process of prising the superfluous male's arms away - quite difficult to do as they hold on with an iron grip and won't let go. They sniffed the toads intently and watched as I dropped the male at one end of the pool and the pair of toads at the other end.

Margot (a very feisty border terrier) stood fascinated in the shallows as the toad pair rolled over revealing the female's belly - a beautiful expanse of ivory white and black marbling. I don't know if that's what prompted Margot to decide that she didn't want to let them go but she reached out and tried to paw them back into the shallows.



### **Crossbills on Erica Trust Land**



Above and Below: Crossbills near the cattle pens
Photos by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: Crossbills brings lots of Birdwatchers and Photographers to Erica Trust Land. You might say "what's new?" as we get varying numbers of Crossbills most years. Well, it all started when a photographer from Weymouth spotted Crossbills drinking from a puddle near the cattle pen just off the Culpepper's Dish road. He then showed his photos on twitter and photographers started arriving from everywhere. Most people see Crossbills up in the trees but not very often coming down to drink in the open. It was a chance to get some good photos, so it went off quite well.



Crossbill by the cattle pens Photo by Roger Hewitt

#### **Other Observations**

Roger Hewitt: A few people said they thought they heard a Dartford Warbler calling but had not seen it. So when it was a bit quieter I had a walk over the heath and sure enough it was sat on a gorse bush. I do not think there is enough heather or gorse for it to stay and breed, but two weeks on and it's still flying around with the Stonechats. So we will just have to wait and see. It's probably a local bird looking for its own territory or a young bird looking for its first territory.

I also saw a Goshawk fly right through the middle of the heath and heard a Woodlark singing.

It's been a very good winter for Firecrest - my best year ever. Also there are still a few Snipe in Briantspuddle Water Meadows. Here I counted at least 20 wintering Chiffchaffs. The Cetti's Warbler has just started singing, and a pair of Reed Bunting have returned. Finally, I'm pleased to report that the Barn Owl is still with us.



Dartford Warbler Photo by Roger Hewitt



Firecrest Photo by Roger Hewitt

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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/05 1 April 2023



Erica Trust Land Photos by Lesley Haskins





Male Sika hiding in gorse on Black Hill Photo by Roger Hewitt

Not a lot of news up to the end of March mainly down to the weather, but on the 17<sup>th</sup> March while looking for Sand Martins at Waddock Farm watercress beds (where I saw three) I spotted a male Goosander fly across the farm. There has been a couple over the winter on the River Frome near Bockhampton, and I was pleased to see one. Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March dawned sunny and warm, so had a wander up to Black Hill. Looking in the old gravel pit I saw 20 Sika Deer.

I also spotted my first butterflies this year with 7 male Brimstones chasing one another around the gorse. As I wandered on towards Kite Hill, I counted another 8 Brimstones, all male, making 15 in total. I don't remember seeing so many on a single walk before. I saw my first Small Tortoiseshell in the water meadow on my way home.

Birds were scarce, with just 1 Yellowhammer and a few Chiffchaffs, besides a few locally common birds.

# Who's been removing my frogspawn?

*lain Freeman*: Does anybody know who is taking frogspawn out of my pond and dumping it at the side? This happened last year and again this year. I presume it is a heron.

*lan Cross:* As you say, a Heron is a possibility although it could be a corvid or even a Blackbird. We've seen all these intelligent and adaptable predators do this at some point.

# **Spring working on Erica Trust land**

Lesley Haskins: Thinking ahead to dry breezy spring and warm summer days, the old plantation rides, (now heathland rides), were cut to form mown firebreaks. This work was done in February - a good time to clear off the last year's growth whilst not running the risk of disturbing any ground nesting birds - Woodlark start very early in the year and indeed Roger Hewitt is noting them now.

Time then to be especially vigilant about keeping dogs on leads and sticking to the permissive paths when enjoying the heath.

Another low or ground nester is the Dartford Warbler. Roger Hewitt reports that we have one, hopefully to soon find a mate, hanging around with a group of Stonechats. Gorse is valuable for many forms of heathland wildlife. For the Dartford it is particularly important in providing shelter and snow free feeding areas in winter. So it is welcomed in blocks scattered over the heath and periodically coppiced so that Dartfords always have some nice bushy gorse somewhere to base their territories around.



Looking over the gate off the main bridleway past the Timber Stack. The yellow band on the gate (and on posts beyond) marks the emergency fire access route for the fire service. Yellow triangles also mark all the key entrance points. The ride leading away from the gate has been cut as part of a network of mown firebreaks.

In the background can be seen patches of yellow flowering European Gorse - vital to Dartford Warblers and other wildlife.

Photo by Lesley Haskins

The cattle fence on the western side of the heath has been checked and a couple of repair jobs noted for sorting before Jake Hancocks' cattle arrive again in early May.

Down in Lee Woods the wildtype daffodils are gradually increasing and another band of hazel coppicing parallel with the Affpuddle Road has commenced.



Some of wildlife type daffodils spreading in 'Lady Debenham's daffodil glade'.

Photo by Lesley Haskins

Over on Starmoor Heath (that part of Hollow Woods Plantation which has been cleared for heathland restoration) a deer fence has been put round the young oaks, hazels, birch and rowan which have been planted to create a broadleaved woodland band running down to the old oaks along the boundary with the field below.



Conservation Team member Damon Wilson with the deer fence around planted trees at the base of Starmoor Heath. Photo by Lesley Haskins

# **Split Gill Mushroom**

lan Cross: The Split Gill Mushroom (Schizophyllum commune) isn't one of those big, bouncy, impressive brackets like the Birch Polypore or the Artist's Fungus, that never fail to attract attention whenever they are encountered. However, though usually overlooked, it is equally fascinating in its own, small way. From above it is not particularly spectacular, appearing like a small, pale, scruffy, nondescript bracket – barely meriting a second look. With their ragged, finger-like edges and delicate structure they always remind me of dainty white lace gloves (picture 1).



Picture 1: From above, the brackets look like white lace gloves

Photo by Ian Cross

Yet its fragile appearance belies its tough nature. This is one of the most widespread fungi on the planet – found on every continent except Antarctica. This may be due to two particular features.

Firstly, Split Gill is extremely versatile. Though it's primarily a wood-rotting fungus, it is able to deal with a wide range of woody plants. In the parish I have seen it on gorse stumps and it can even grow on cut timber. However, this doesn't exhaust the range of hosts. Other plant-based materials can be used, and it will even colonise silage bales.

The second reason lies in its special 'super power'. This is due to the peculiar structure of its gills (picture 2). These radiate from a central point and are split into two along their entire length – hence the name. The fold created opens and closes according to humidity. When conditions are damp the two halves

spread apart to reveal broad, gutter-like troughs exposing the spores within. When dry weather prevails this trough closes up, sealing the spore-bearing surface safely inside.

Split Gills can undergo several cycles of this dehydration and rehydration, giving them not one, but many opportunities to release their spores. The brackets themselves can be surprisingly long-lived: this remarkable fungus is truly a resilient survivor.



Picture 2: From below, every gill is seen to be divided into two halves along their entire length. Photo by Ian Cross

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,

Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website

Margaret Cheetham, Editor

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

# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/06 8 April 2023



Eli with Smooth Snake Photo by Sam Spencer

## Eli returns to Affpuddle

Adrian Middleton: With Easter on the horizon, Eli and his family have made their first trip of the year to Affpuddle. It was early days to go in search of our cold-blooded friends but with clear blue skies and plenty of sunshine we were full of optimism that they would be venturing out after their winter hibernation.

Heading off we soon spotted several bright yellow Brimstone butterflies and then as we approached the heath we saw a Roe deer, somewhat hesitant, making its way across a wide track.

It wasn't long before we found a large Slow Worm, followed by a another two, all males and all very similar. Often it is the males that emerge before the females in the early part of the season. The three all lacked the dark stripes usually associated with females and one had a few blue-grey spots on its body. Eli soon spotted a black beetle with iridescent markings which we had missed. Unfortunately, it headed off too quickly to be identified.

The Slow Worms had given us some hope of spotting other reptiles and whilst always a surprise we were soon to see two adult male Smooth Snakes, at first glance rather alike with spots along their backs, but one was browner looking, the other greyer, and underneath one mainly yellow and the other more copper-coloured.

Then there was a Chiffchaff calling repeatedly in the top of a small tree along with a basking Peacock butterfly, both finally flying off in full view - but not together.

So we made our way home and soon saw more Brimstones in the garden. The compost hotel was quiet, but we were pleased to find over twenty Palmate Newts, mainly adults, both males and females, some of the latter judging by their shape appeared to be carrying eggs.

But now it was time for Eli and me to start our hunt for Easter eggs - many thanks to Emma and Sam!



Above: Setting out and below: Smooth Snake Photos by Sam Spencer





Easter Egg hunt! Photo by Emma Thornton

#### **News of Swifts**

Angie Talbot: Good news is that Swifts migrating from Southern Africa (which includes Swifts heading for the UK) have just started to arrive in the south of France. Our Briantspuddle swifts are not due to arrive here until the first week in May, but of course that will depend very much on the weather they encounter along the way.

However if you would like to get an idea of the numbers of birds, not just swifts, that are migrating through the south of France each day take a look at <a href="https://www.trektellen.org">www.trektellen.org</a>

Look for Falaise de Leucate which is on the south Mediterranean coast of France near to the border with Spain. On the 4<sup>th</sup> April there were 294 Swifts, 3518 Swallows, 1121 House Martins and 134 Sand Martins all heading north, however it is not known which countries they are heading towards. These are some of the first swifts migrating from Africa to arrive in France and depending

on the weather over the following days/weeks the numbers will increase greatly. Perhaps some of 'our' swifts will be among them. Let's hope the weather is good and they will be with us soon.

# Government Petition for Swift bricks in new housing.

There is currently a Government Petition 'to make swift bricks compulsory in new housing to help red-listed birds' which some Wildlife Newsletter readers may like to sign – it currently has around 81,500 signatures but needs 100,000 by 30<sup>th</sup> April for the petition to be considered for debate in Parliament. Just search 'Government Petitions', then 'Open Petitions', then 'Swifts'.



**Large Tortoiseshell** 

The first parish Large Tortoiseshell – an image hastily snatched before it disappeared, never to be seen again. Photo by Ian Cross

*Ian Cross*: You may be wondering why such a poor quality butterfly image features in this edition of the newsletter. I must admit, this is the worst photo I have ever taken that hasn't gone straight into the recycle bin. However, the

reason for showing it is that this the first and only record of a new species of butterfly for the parish – the Large Tortoiseshell. This individual passed through our area on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April, alighting for a fraction of a second just twice, before sweeping up over a woodland edge and disappearing over the horizon. Such is the determined focus of these post-hibernation butterflies as they search for a mate, that it resolutely refused to even pause at a flower.

The history of the Large Tortoiseshell in Britain has been a rollercoaster ride of boom and bust. It has always been prone to periods of relative abundance followed by a dearth of records. The last time of plenty was in the 1940s after which it just seemed to fade away, and by the 1960s it was regarded as being extinct as a breeding species in England.

Dorset was never a stronghold and it disappeared here earlier than in more favoured localities such as the New Forest. However, in recent years there have been reports of Large Tortoiseshells breeding on Portland, with webs of caterpillars being found on elm trees. Occasional sightings of adults have been made elsewhere, mainly along the south coast.

The origins of this population are hotly debated. The favoured theory is that it is a result of escapes or deliberate releases from imported breeding stock. The alternative is that the larval webs are the product of sporadic immigration. The same uncertainty applies to the very rare sightings elsewhere in the county – of which our April butterfly is an example.

So, how do we know that this is a Large Tortoiseshell and not its infinitely more common namesake, the Small Tortoiseshell? Strangely, this is a butterfly that is obviously something unusual when seen in flight. It's only when you look closer that it becomes difficult to pin down just what it is that makes the Large Tortoiseshell different.

The Large Tortoiseshell is slightly larger, as the name suggests (though this is the <u>least</u> useful identification feature). Even on the wing it is clearly a more gingery-brown, compared with the richer reddish-orange of the Small Tortoiseshell. Indeed, to me its behaviour and flight pattern is more reminiscent of a Comma butterfly. These are the helpful flight characters. To clinch your identification you need to wait until the butterfly settles and look

for an extra dark spot on the forewing (marked with an arrow on this enlargement):



Above: The arrow marks the extra spot, missing on the Small Tortoiseshell.

This makes four little spots in an inverted 'Y-shape'. Photo by Ian Cross.

Below: The Small Tortoiseshell has only three spots in the same area. Photo by Ian Cross.



My poor quality picture on page 5 illustrates a wider point. It's always worth snatching a picture when the opportunity arises and sending it in. Sometimes, even the poorest image can contain the information needed to confirm identity.

I have no idea as to the origins of this example, or whether it is a one-off or heralds a new era of sightings. However, it would be worth keeping an eye open for further individuals, especially among the butterflies crowding on the buddleia later in the season. It would be lovely to have more records of this fascinating butterfly from the parish. Because it is one of those butterflies most subject to hopeful misidentification, a photo will be needed to substantiate any record. The good news is, a high quality image isn't vital, as you can see!

# 8<sup>th</sup> April: First Cuckoo

Roger Hewitt: this morning heard my first Cuckoo calling near Oakers Wood at 11.25am

Ian Cross: I also heard a cuckoo this afternoon, near Oakers Bog.

(Their recent population decline makes this a Red List species in the 2021 UK Conservation Status Report. Red is the highest conservation priority, with species on this list needing urgent action. Species on this list, such as cuckoos, are globally threatened, with big declines in breeding populations and ranges).

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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from the bridge in Briantspuddle. Photo by Lesley Haskins.

#### **Dorset Deer**

Lesley Haskins: One evening last week I was lucky enough not to be spotted by a deer having a wade in the water as I approached the main bridge out of the village.

Here in Briantspuddle I mostly see Sika deer, and the deer netting we put up on Erica Trust land has to be 1.8 metres to be effective.

However, at my own home in Wimborne and on Erica Trust reserves at Merely, Ferndown and Verwood, we get pretty much only Roe Deer. So we need only a 1.5-metre netting - which is easier to handle.

I am told that Sika are sometimes seen in these more easterly regions, but they never seem to occur in significant numbers.

I rather imagine them taking one look at the great deer over Stag Gate along the A31 and deciding the competition is too great and bolting back west!





(photo from wikipedia)

*Ian Cross*: we can summarise Dorset deer distribution as follows:

- Sika stronghold is Purbeck and the Poole Basin, the most abundant deer in the parish.
- **Roe** throughout Dorset, common in the parish.
- Fallow mainly West Dorset and North-east of Blandford, scattered elsewhere. Not in the parish.
- Muntjac widespread but scattered and infrequent, probably under-recorded.

#### **Rove Beetle**

Adrian Middleton: Recently (on Easter Saturday) I found a small, slender black beetle on a white ledge inside my back door. Chris Nother and I believe this to be a small type of rove beetle. It was about 7-8 mm long. Its flying wings were initially hidden under the short pair of wing cases. Under more normal circumstances I expect it would have been better hidden.

Quite recently Ian wrote an interesting account about the Devil's Coach Horse a large rove beetle (newsletter 2022/62) and did say we have about 1000 different kinds of rove beetle which I anticipate could make species I.D. difficult. I shall be interested in his comments.



*Ian Cross:* Instantly recognisable as a rove beetle. Probably a species of Staphylininae or Paederinae but these two subfamilies alone contain roughly 50 genera in the UK, so even putting it down to genus is difficult.

### Is that fungus wearing mascara?

*Ian Cross:* With such a lovely set of lashes as these, the answer is, yes, of course!

This is a fungus I have wanted to see for many years. As so often happens, I only came across it by accident, when I wasn't particularly searching for it and, of all places, here in our garden.



Eyelash Fungus – easy to see how it gets its name

Photo by Ian Cross

This is the Eyelash Fungus, Eyelash Cup or Common Eyelash (*Scutellinia scutellata*). It's one of the disc fungi, in the same general group as the Orange Peel Fungus or Scarlet Elf Cup. This species has a shallow, orange disc but is particularly distinctive as the edges of the disc are lined with black bristles. Though easy to identify it does tend to be overlooked as it's fairly diminutive: less than a centimetre across. It's quite common on wet, rotting wood or damp ground.

### **Signs of Spring**

Lesley Haskins: There is a short time in the spring when the primroses, celandines and wood anemones are still looking lovely and the bluebells are just starting to show - and it is now, so if you want to get the full hit list for the old woodland belt along the northern edge of Erica Trust woodland, do go up soon. But if you wait a little longer the bluebells will be magnificent......



Spring Flowers Photo by Lesley Haskins

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 2023/08 13 May 2023



Native Bluebells on Erica Trust land. Photo by Simon Eames



Native Bluebells on Erica Trust land
Photos by Simon Eames



#### **Bluebell Wars?**

Simon Eames: Is it just my imagination or has there been an increasing prevalence of invasive Spanish bluebells growing "wild" in the parish over recent years? I have been told that colour is not always indicative but that the true English indigenous variety have narrower trumpet-shaped flowers growing from one side of a drooping stem, and that the wider bell-shaped bluebells are originally from Spanish imports sold by garden centres. Firstly is this true or is that too simplistic? And secondly is it the case that these "foreign" bulbs, if dug up unwanted from the garden (as I have myself with literally many hundreds), should be destroyed rather than recycled or planted in the wild as they are more dominant and are gradually taking over?

The wonderful spread along the western side of the Erica Trust land, including the truly spectacular and fragrant display at the south western corner, appears (to me) to be 100% native, as do many others locally including those in the raised bank at the top of The Hollow. However, I'm seeing a surprising number of wild patches of what I think of as Spanish invaders, most notably including the large area in Turners Puddle churchyard. To me there do seem to be an increasing number of "foreign" patches growing wild around the parish.



Spanish Bluebells at Turnerspuddle Church. Photos by Simon Eames



So are these all just unwanted stowaways from gardens that are self-setting and spreading? Should they be discouraged or treated as welcome diversification? Is the Battle of the Bluebells really a red/grey squirrel thing where the invading Johnny Foreigner hordes are gradually wiping out our good old true-blue British stalwarts, or can they happily be left to co-exist?





Spanish Bluebells in the parish. Photos by Simon Eames.





White Spanish Bluebells in the parish. Photos by Simon Eames.

*Ian Cross*: The Spanish Bluebell has featured in previous issues e.g. 2021/105. Most plants we call "Spanish Bluebell" are actually hybrids between Spanish Bluebell and our native species. As so often happens, the crossbreeds have enormous hybrid vigour and have become a successful and aggressive coloniser.

I have been waging war against this unwelcome invader in our garden for years — a war I have been consistently losing. So far they don't seem to have penetrated our ancient woodlands to any great extent — being confined to sites disturbed by human activity such as near gardens and on road verges. But who knows how long we can rely on this. All I can advise is, whatever you do don't dispose of unwanted "Spanish Bluebells" by throwing them out into the countryside. Put them in with the green waste for collection by the council.

# **Firecrests on Erica Trust land**



Firecrest on Erica Trust land. Photo by Ben Williams.



Firecrest on Erica Trust land. Photo by Ben Williams.

Lesley Haskins: These delightful photographs of male Firecrests displaying the orange centres of their crests, were taken by visitor Ben Williams at the western end of the main Erica Trust woodland in April. The holly in which they are seen is typical breeding habitat for these small birds.

Records of breeding Firecrests are not common but they are believed to be spreading their breeding range in the UK. We have something of an abundance of holly in the woods so it is nice to know of its various uses - not least of course its flowers for feeding Holly Blue caterpillars and its berries for birds. It does seed prolifically and casts deep shade which tends to suppress any ground flora, so we do have to control it to stop it taking over too much ground.

**ID Question**Submitted by Chrissie Garside



*Chrissie Garside*: The little moth ended up coupled with a larger moth! Can you identify?

*Ian Cross:* Ruby Tiger. The one on the left is the same species as the mating pair. It's just that he's fluttering his wings so you can see the pink abdomen underneath.

*Chrissie Garside*: I did wonder, hoping for breeding as they stayed coupled for an hour or more! Must check their favourite plants?

*Ian Cross:* Ruby Tiger caterpillars are polyphagous – which is the fancy term which means they will eat an enormous range of plants.

**ID Question**Submitted by Helen Frost



Helen Frost: I found this on the footpath in Moreton and couldn't identify it. Ian Cross: It's a Glow Worm larva.



Male Orange Tip. Photo by Helen Frost

#### A determined Oil Beetle

Adrian Middleton: At the end of April I found myself heading back into old territory at the edge of the parish. It was the first time this year with my previous visit last Autumn. How different would things be? The weather was fine but cold one minute and warm the next when the sun came out briefly.

Almost immediately I was confronted with a determined Oil Beetle hurrying rather awkwardly across my path. The sharp bend in each antenna would indicate this was a male: he uses these strange-shaped antennae during courtship advances; the pitted shape of its thorax at the rear would suggest it was a Violet Oil Beetle rather than a Black Oil Beetle. Then there was a dung beetle busying itself on some Roe Deer droppings. I let it be.



Black Oil Beetle (Meloe proscarabeus) Photo by Adrian Middleton

Ian Cross: Adrian's photo is a male of the Black Oil Beetle (Meloe proscarabeus). I've yet to see a confirmed example of the Violet Oil Beetle (Meloe violaceus) in the parish so, until one turns up, the Black Oil Beetle is the only species you will see locally.

There's an excellent guide to identifying oil beetles available online at Buglife:

https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/07/Oil-Beetle-management-sheet.pdf

However, <u>beware</u>: the authors get a bit confused with "thorax" when they mean prothorax.

Also, they mention a depressed area at the rear of the thorax but don't caution the reader to be careful to distinguish this from the "step" down to the integument between the prothorax and the rest of the thorax.

Swallow at Affpuddle Photo by Helen Frost



**Lady's Smock at Moreton**Photos by Helen Frost





Sika Deer at Oakers Wood

Showing different stages of Antler Growth

Photo by Helen Frost



## A spring walk on heathland

Adrian Middleton: I found myself on heathland where on previous occasions it has been a case of "when the going gets tough, the tough get going". There, not really much of a surprise, was a large robust-looking female Grass Snake. I also noted the black and white marbling on its underside which can vary considerably between individuals and help with identification. And before I knew it, sightings of another Grass Snake -a little smaller but still an adult, more likely a male.



A large female Grass Snake

Photo by Adrian Middleton

I pressed on and soon saw a small adder with the black zig-zag down its back – very like one I had seen last year and in exactly the same place. There were several male Slow Worms about the place too.

A Song Thrush and Chaffinch were singing as well and a Chiffchaff made its distinctive repetitive calls and a Small Tortoiseshell butterfly fluttered about eventually settling briefly to bask where I would shortly tread, as I made for home.

**Birds at Moreton**Photos by Helen Frost



Above: Hobby. Below: Dartford Warbler
Photos by Helen Frost





Above: Tree Pipit. Below: Firecrest Photos by Helen Frost





Above: Cliffchaff. Below: Male Blackcap Photos by Helen Frost





Canada Goose Photo by Helen Frost

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
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### **Swift Update**

Angie Talbot: Yes we have swifts!

I saw six over the village hall last Sunday evening (7th May) and ones and twos in the week. In total we should get 5 nesting pairs, possibly more as all 5 boxes were occupied last year.

The numbers counted in the last few weeks coming over the French coast and Corsica are on some days in the thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, especially as the weather is a bit more settled and warmer.

# **Emerging from the pond**

*Vivi Armitage*: I think this dragonfly must have only just hatched from the pond as it was very bad at flying....





Broad-bodied Chaser Photos by Vivi Armitage See close-up below



Broad-bodied Chaser Photo by Vivi Armitage

# **Garden Update**

Tasie Russell: In my garden I had a Holly Blue butterfly, and a Hummingbird Hawkmoth on my rosemary.

# The Purseweb Spider – Britain's 'Tarantula'

*Ian Cross*: Although not one of those spiders with a huge, 'leggy' span, the Purseweb Spider (*Atypus affinis*) is one of the most impressive and formidable spiders in the parish.

Technically speaking, this is Britain's only 'mygalomorph' spider, which sets it apart from all other British spiders and makes it the closest thing we have to those tropical giants: the tarantulas, funnel web and trap-door spiders.

What makes it one of this group is the construction of the massive jaws. Instead of meeting together in a pincer action, the jaws move up and down vertically and are often said to work in a 'pickaxe' fashion. They are certainly very powerful and the Purseweb Spider uses them for digging burrows as well as grappling with prey.

Burrowing is what this spider does best and it spends most of its time underground in a silk-lined tunnel. The silk tube continues above ground and is supposed to resemble an old-fashioned purse – hence the name. Though, to me, it looks more like a dirty, old sock - dirty because the silk is camouflaged by having bits of soil and other debris plastered all over it (picture 1).



1. The 'Purseweb' – though more like a sock than a purse. Photo by Ian Cross.

Despite the camouflage, these tubes are the best way to find this spider. I find the purses surprisingly easy to see once you 'get your eye in'. The silken sock works as a kind of ambush killing zone and tripwire trap. The spider lurks out of sight in the underground section. If some small invertebrate stumbles over the above ground part, it sends vibrations along the silk walls and down into the burrow. The resident spider rushes up along the tube and spears its unfortunate prey by slamming its huge, pickaxe jaws right through the tunnel wall. The prey is then pulled inside through a slit in the silk and dragged underground to be devoured at leisure.

The Purseweb Spider itself is seldom encountered as they rarely venture above ground. Though, the males are sometimes seen as they wander in search of females in the autumn or spring (picture 2). When he finds a female's purse, he taps tentatively on the outside. If she is receptive, he is allowed to open up the silk tube and move in with the female for a while, sometimes cohabiting for several months. If she's not interested, she tugs furiously on the tube and he soon gets the message and wanders off to find romance elsewhere.



2. Male Purseweb Spider – a slimmer, glossy-black version of the female. Photo by Ian Cross.

As I say, it's not a long-leggy spider but fairly chunky in appearance. The male is about 7 to 9 mm long, the female (picture 3) is a more substantial 10 to 18 mm. Like many heavily-built spiders they can be surprisingly long-lived, taking about four years to reach maturity and sometimes lasting for three or four years after that: an impressive seven or eight years in all – not a bad innings for a spider.



3. Female Purseweb – spends all her life in her burrow. Photo by Ian Cross.

The Purseweb Spider needs several things to thrive: a hot, sunny climate; a habitat with a loose, easily-worked substrate; and good drainage. Heathland provides all these requirements and we are lucky to have a good population of this magnificent spider in the parish. Officially this is classed as a nationally-scarce species, mainly confined to south-east England. Scarce and fascinating: to my mind the Purseweb Spider is more worthy of admiration than fear and loathing.



# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/10 28 May 2023



Swan and Cygnets by the bridge in Briantspuddle Photos by Sue Taylor





Above: Swan with Cygnets Photo by Roger Hewitt Below: Swans and Cygnets by the bridge Photo by Lesley Haskins





"All on board" Photo by Lesley Haskins

#### Affpuddle and a bit beyond

Adrian Middleton: May has proved to be slow off the mark in the garden and it is only in recent days that wildlife seems to be really on the move there with Orange Tip, Brimstone and Holly Blue butterflies showing more regularly along with Pine Hawk and Chocolate Tip (chocolate colouring on the wing tips and of the abdomen) amongst the few moths. Birds have included Swallows, House Martins and Swifts flying overhead and Siskins at the bird feeders which prompts me to mention a Red Kite following the plough with many gulls and members of the crow family a few weeks back in the West Farm field behind the house, now greened over.

This motivated me to venture further afield again, out of the parish onto some heathland undergoing restoration with tree clearance taking place over the

last few years. With fair numbers of lizards about, unexpectedly I spotted a moth resting on hazel leaves. At first I thought this was a likely ichneumon wasp but no, on closer observation it was found to be a clearwing moth.



Large Red-belted Clearwing from adjoining parish
Photo by Adrian Middleton

I photographed it before it could fly off and showed the very small image on the camera to a fellow observer who initially believed it to be the Red-belted Clearwing. But the habitat was all wrong for this one which likes orchards. This was bewildering. An enlargement, however, proved it to be the similarly scarce Large Red-belted Clearwing, so a bit bigger and showing the characteristic red on the scales of the wings where these join the body (missing from the other clearwing). The female of the Large Red-belted Clearwing lays eggs in the felled stumps of birch which fitted the picture much better.

This was a first for me and it had me wondering about the status of related clearwing moths in our parish.

*Ian Cross*: a nice photo. This Clearwing has been recorded in the parish and we have had an item on Parish Clearwings in previous newsletters. Look out for a follow-up article in the next edition of the newsletter.

Adrian Middleton: Somewhat encouraged, I have been out and about more on other heathland in the parish and saw an attractive female Smooth Snake, the first seen at a particular site for about a year so another bit of good news. Ravens were calling, along with a Stonechat and there were several Southern Marsh Orchids in bloom afoot. On the way back there was a Green Hairstreak butterfly on gorse, the first I've seen in that area too. So, with everything looking better, I made my way home.



Smooth Snake Photo by Adrian Middleton



Southern Marsh Orchid Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### **Lords-and-Ladies**

Jamie MacMillan: I have a lot of Lords-and-Ladies in the garden so am familiar with their leaves. I made a rare foray to my compost heap at the back and came across some Arum leaves that were huge, and I think are Arum italicum. No sign of flowers yet, but italicum is later than maculatum, so that is another point in favour. I've left the Cleavers in shot so you can see the size.



Arum italicum var. pictum Photo by Jamie MacMillan



Probable Arum italicum Photo by Jamie MacMillan

Jamie MacMillan: I have had the attractive Arum italicum var. pictum spring up nearby (with much smaller leaves), so I guess my birds have found a source of berries for both. Any newsletter readers have it? It is recommended as a garden plant in some places!

lan Cross: Arum italicum grows as a garden escape in at least one site in the parish. We have had articles on the berries of Lords and Ladies and their poisonous properties, as well as an item on the leaves being mistaken for Sorrel!

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
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# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/11 3 June 2023



Reed Warbler Photo by Roger Hewitt



Sedge Warbler Photo by Roger Hewitt

#### **Bird Update**

Roger Hewitt: It's been an odd spring for migrant birds, it started okay then it seemed to stall and slowed to a trickle, everyone was wondering what was going on and complaining of a lack of birds. Guessing they must have been held up in bad weather systems further south.

As I write this at the end of May, birds are still arriving at Portland Bill Observatory on a daily basis. However, our Reed and Sedge Warblers made it back to our meadows and glad to say it looks like we have a few more than last year. The Garden Warbler also returned. It's nice to pull back the bedroom curtains in the mornings and see the Swifts flying around the village hall, some people have said they have their Swallows back but numbers seem to be down, also a few House Martins at Throop. The Cuckoo has stayed, so it must have found enough nests to lay its eggs in.

I have also observed Common Whitethroats at Rogers Hill Farm and two Spotted Flycatchers near Moor Lane. Hobbies, Nightjars and Honey Buzzards are also back.

Red kites have been mentioned, but the last two weeks have been almost daily, with 200+ reported in Cornwall on their yearly fly around, but my best count was four, with most sightings being of ones or twos and with all the clear skies most have been very high up.

I have seen the local Goshawk in our water meadows in the evening and that could end in disaster for our Barn Owl which is hunting almost every night. One night it took five items of prey back to its box in just over an hour, so must be feeding young. We have to keep our fingers crossed on that one.

And to prove that some birds are late coming back, I took an evening walk on Turnerspuddle Heath on 30<sup>th</sup> May and spotted this male Whinchat in the photo enjoying a rest mixing in with some newly fledged Stonechat chicks, so he had best get a move on.



Whinchat Photo by Roger Hewitt

#### **ID Question**

Jane Courtier: This photo is a bit of a cheat because it was taken in Studland and not in the parish, but I thought it might be a species that is likely to be seen in our area too. It's not a creature I've come across before but it is quite distinctive with its spotty back so I was soon able to identify it (correctly, I hope!) as a Green Tiger Beetle. Apparently it's common on heathland, which is why I thought it is possibly present in the parish. It was quite difficult to photograph as it was very fast moving, presumably scurrying about in search of the small insects that are its food source.





*Ian Cross*: Yes, it is Green Tiger Beetle and it's very common in the parish. I saw my first this year on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Here is a mating couple:



Green Tiger Beetle Photo by Ian Cross

# **Clearwing Moths in the Parish**

*Ian Cross*: Clearwing moths are rarely recorded in the parish. The reason for this is simple: they don't come to light, so tend not to be recorded by the parish's growing network of light trap operators.

As caterpillars, clearwing moths are internal feeders in stems and rootstocks, usually of woody plants. This means they remain hidden in tunnels deep under the bark of their host plant. So, not only are the adult moths elusive, but the caterpillars are rarely seen as well.

Once, finding clearwings was a painstaking task and took a certain level of field craft. However, science has come to our aid and they are now being found regularly, often in numbers, by the use of pheromone "lures", which mimic the scents the female moths use to attract the males.

These can be extremely effective. A regular newsletter contributor, Julian Francis, is the leading exponent of this method locally and has built up an enviable list of clearwing moths in a neighbouring parish. There is no reason why most, if not all, of the species he has been recording recently shouldn't be found in our parish too. I am indebted to him for background information on the species from his area.

Apart from this, the only way they are likely to be found is by chance encounters with the recently-emerged adults, often near their breeding sites. Adrian Middleton's recent report of the Large Red-belted Clearwing in a nearby parish is almost certainly a sighting of this kind. Its caterpillar feeds in birch stumps so there is plenty of habitat for it in our area.

There is one clearwing that does seem to be found relatively frequently by the casual observer: the Six-belted Clearwing (photo 1). This is a day-flying species so it has more of chance of being seen. Its caterpillar feeds in the rootstocks of Bird's-foot Trefoil, so I often see the adults along the edges of flowery tracks in our area. This mating pair was photographed not far from Rimsmoor pool.



Photo 1 Six-belted Clearwing mating. The male is on the left. Photo by Ian Cross

Very, very occasionally clearwing moths visit flowers. This is a habit I see much more frequently on the continent and I'm used to finding a range of species in sunny, flowery meadows when I'm abroad. I'm not sure why this is such an unusual occurrence in Britain.

One species I have encountered on flowers in the UK is the Sallow Clearwing (photo 2). As a caterpillar it feeds in the young stems of willows, forming a gall that takes the form of a slight swelling. This moth has a two year life cycle: something that is quite common in clearwings because their foodstuff – woody tissue – is not particularly nutritious. To a certain extent Sallow Clearwings manage to synchronise their emergence, so that the moths tend to be commoner every other year – in this case in even years.



Photo 2: Sallow Clearwing male on Gypsywort. Photo by Ian Cross

This example in the photograph was seen in 2020. It shows the moth's trademark transparent wings, the "clearwing" of their name. This is due to the almost total absence of the tiny scales that cover the wings of most moths and

butterflies. Though the few scales that do remain on the wings can be surprisingly attractive – see the Six-belted Clearwing above.



Photo: 3 Orange-tailed Clearwing emergence hole in Wayfaring Tree. Photo by Ian Cross

Transparent wings, and their frequent pattern of yellow or red bands round the abdomen, gives them the appearance of wasps rather than moths — an excellent example of mimicry. This provides them with some protection against predators, which usually give wasps a wide berth. I know this works as, when I am studying wasps on the continent, I often find that the unusual 'wasp' I have been following from flower to flower is actually a clearwing moth.

Before the advent of pheromone lures, the traditional method for finding clearwings, one that called for the detailed field craft mentioned earlier, was by searching for the holes made by the emerging adults. Although science has relieved us of this laborious task, the Orange-tailed Clearwing remains as a species that is relatively easily found by searching for the emergence holes in the stems of its favoured food plant, Wayfaring Tree (photo 3).

#### The cuckoo and the adder



Adder Photo by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: I have recently returned to a place in the parish where some of the going can be rough. There is usually quite a lot of interesting wildlife there including butterflies and dragonflies, birds and reptiles.

And so it was at the end of May. My attention this time was drawn to two wildlife species namely the cuckoo and the adder. A neighbour had mentioned cuckoos calling there on several occasions this year and so it was not surprising to hear a male soon after my arrival. No one can mistake the male's call, often however heard at distance and it can be a lost cause trying to see the bird itself. I can recollect the bubbling call of the female too at another location nearby—a giveaway enabling her to be seen quite close to hand, with a bit of patience. But this time I was determined to see the male. So it was a case of hands together and blow "cuckoo". Sure enough a male cuckoo came into

view. But it didn't take it too long to cotton on to the deception as it flew quickly by, circling several times amongst the trees, dodging amongst the branches as it did so. Its flight was almost hawk-like, whilst also showing its distinctive stripy markings.

(Ian Cross: There's also an account of "Calling Down a Cuckoo" in newsletter 2021:87)

Adrian Middleton: Then it was the turn of the adder. I badly wanted to see one and so assure myself that all was well there for this animal, a species declining in numbers these days. After a bit of a trek, I was pleased to spot one near a pile of wood. The logs were to become my seat for a good half hour whilst I waited for it to reappear and the opportunity to photograph it. As I was to discover, it was an adult female, close to sloughing its skin. It seemed as if it couldn't see me too well because its eyes were a bluish colour as result of the sloughing process affecting the detaching scale (the brille) over the eye. The darkening of the body scales was also evident. I hoped one day I will see it again with a smart reddish-brown body and zig zag and those red eyes with elliptical black pupils.

With my photographs I took leave of my resting place and headed home once more.





Blue Tit: Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: The blue tits have returned to the nest box in the cherry tree in our garden - I hope to catch them when they pop out!

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.

# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/12 29 June 2023

William visits Briantspuddle Photos by Lindy Ventham



# William comes to Affpuddle

Adrian Middleton:
At the beginning of June,
William aged twelve,
who is keen on wildlife,
came to my home with
his grandparents. He was
raring to go out onto the
heath again like he had
last year. The weather
was fine and whilst there
had been a cold north



wind overnight by morning it was warm and sunny.

Reptiles were top of the agenda as they had been before. We had seen a smooth snake last time, but we were keen to see another one. It was nice to see a small amount of heather was coming into flower as we headed off, with William leading the way along a heathland track. Our hopes were soon raised when we saw a young grass snake but ever so briefly as it sloped off. There was a buzzard circling overhead, and we could see tree pipits singing and displaying at the top of some conifers.

We pressed on and searched all the old familiar places but with no luck. We had clambered along narrow tracks for what seemed like a mile or more. It was nice to see that some of the heather was coming into flower. But we had almost given up hope. Quite unexpectedly William spotted something curled up deep in a patch of thick heather. A quick glance proved it to be a smooth snake which we would otherwise have missed.

I was able to catch it after a bit of a scramble as it headed deeper into the cover. With no harm done we were able to have a good look at it and see that it was an adult female shortly going to shed its skin -rather a dark grey general colour and with blueish eyes. It might have been in a fight or something similar as it was found to have a blunt tail.

It appeared to have dropped deeper into cover to avoid the overwhelming heat. Whilst we as mammals have various mechanisms for dealing with heat including sweating this is something which reptiles can't do. It can be especially dangerous for them if they overheat.

After releasing the snake into some deep heather where we had found it, the time had come for us all to have a long cool drink.

William had saved the day – a gold star award for him!

On the way back we saw a large rather intimidating ichneumon wasp and a ladybird- like beetle with black stripes and dots. By now there was also a cuckoo calling in the distance too.

Time passed quickly and we had to start our journey back where I was able to show them some moths which I had found in the garden including a White

Ermine, aptly named, with its black spots on a white background and also a fluffy Pale Tussock, its fore legs projecting forwards.

Unfortunately, by then it was time for me to say farewell to my visitors but we are all looking forward to our next meet-up to go in search of some of our wildlife again.



Pale Tussock Photo by Adrian Middleton



White Ermine Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### **More on Bluebell Wars**

(see edition 2023/08)

Susan Puttick: I read this Newsletter with great interest, having watched the English bluebell, in woodlands, ditches, fields and mother's garden all my life.

Sadly the Spanish bluebell has taken over in Mum's garden (no longer the English delicate native bluebell of my youth), but easy enough to control, by not letting them drop seed. Having said that, the 'thugs' are really rather beautiful and I have to forgive them. I understand that this would be devastating in our natural woodlands, where they must be kept under control and prevented from killing off our English bluebell forever.

#### **ID Questions**

Kasia Robins: What pupa are these ants were taking to their nest? I am also wondering if they are detrimental in a vegetable bed?



Photos taken from video stills by Kasia Robins

*Ian Cross:* This is an ant's nest that has been disturbed. The creamy-white ovals are ant pupae (the equivalent of a chrysalis stage) which the worker ants are desperately trying to take to safety. They are harmless to your vegetables.

Kasia Robins: Happy to host them!

Michelle Cross: Can you identify this butterfly/moth from the picture?

Ian Cross: This is the Mint Moth (Pyrausta aurata), it's associated with all kinds of garden mints and herbs such as Marjoram. It loves nothing more than a sunny, sheltered herb garden.



Photo by Michelle Cross

### **Spiders at Dawn**

*Trevor Poole*: I am often greeted by a myriad of these in the damp grass just after sunrise on meadows grazed overnight by our horses.

I have always thought they were some sort of spider but have never spotted the culprit. Can you shed some light on this who this trogolodite might be?

*Ian Cross*: These sheet webs are usually produced by money spiders, Linyphiidae.



Photo by Trevor Poole

Trevor Poole: That's amazing - they are so small but the webs are 8-9" across and so dense. How can they get enough benefit for all that hard work over the space of one night?

*Ian Cross*: There was an article on one of commonest money spiders in newsletter 2021/188. I'm not sure how often and how much prey they need to catch to make it worthwhile. Spiders do eat the silk of the old web - nature's natural recycling, so nothing is wasted.

### **Red Kite update**

Roger and Christine Hewitt: Red Kites are still coming through this one on the 9th June quite low over our house and the village. We were having lunch in the garden and it looked interested in what we were eating. It circled round a few times before drifting off.



Red Kite Photo by Roger Hewitt



Red Kite Photo by Roger Hewitt

**Long-tailed Tits**Photo by Helen Frost showing "pink-lidded" bird (see explanation below)



Helen Frost: In the last few days I have been having a wander round the garden and today we had about 15 long tailed tits arrive en masse. I took a few shots and noticed that some birds had yellow eyelids and some pink. The former also appeared to have pinker plumage and I assumed them to be the adult birds. However, "Dr Google" tells me that the colouration is due to a change in mood:

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00063658409476812



Photo by Helen Frost showing "yellow-lidded" bird (see explanation above)

# A Tale of Two Dragonflies

Adrian Middleton: Here are two dragonflies. One shows a Southern Hawker with wings which didn't straighten correctly after emergence from my pond and the other is a more fortunate Broad-bodied Chaser which Liz Whatley found in her conservatory and was able to release safely.

# **Broad-bodied Chaser rescued and released**

Photo by Liz Whatley



# Southern Hawker with damaged wing emerging from garden pond

Photo by Adrian Middleton



*Ian Cross*: This kind of contorted shape is common when dragonflies try to 'inflate' their wings in confined spaces, where there isn't quite enough room for the wings to expand. Unfortunately, once dried, there is nothing that can be done to repair the damage.

### **Heather Crab Spider**

Ben Williams: I have attached a couple of shots of a Heather Crab Spider, Thomisus onustus, from the heath at Oakerswood, they are very hard to see, but with the warmer weather and milder winters more are surviving and so they are a bit more common.

# https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomisus onustus

This is a female (see photos below)/ The males are tiny.



Above and below: Heather Crab Spider Photos by Ben Williams

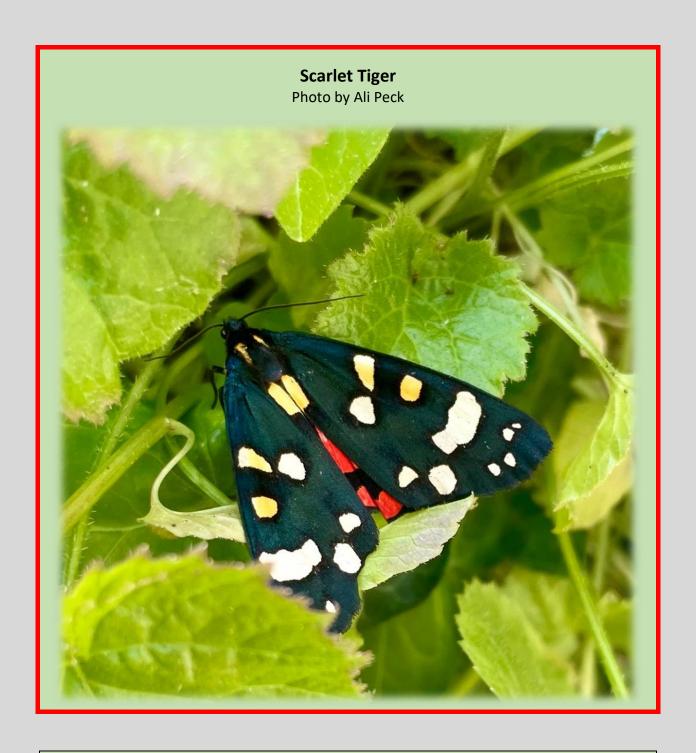


**Marsh Helleborine** 

Photo by Sue Taylor



Sue Taylor: I thought you might like this photo of a Marsh Helleborine found by the track that runs parallel to Moreton Drove. I have never seen one there before. Usually there are plenty of Southern Marsh or Common Spotted Orchids, so this was rather unusual.



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 2023/13 14 July 2023

Moonlight at Blackhill
Still from video
By Simon Goddard
Taken while watching and listening to Nightjars

### Nightjar

Trevor Poole: Sorry this image is a bit grainy – Carole snapped this with her iPhone on an evening walk along the road from Throop Clump to Culpepper's Dish at 10.15 pm on 9th July.

She said it sounded like a hammer drill – I think that means that it is advertising for a mate?



*lan Cross:* The churring 'song' is the male proclaiming his territory. Therefore, the main purpose is to keep out other males, whilst at the same time advertising to any females that he is a male in possession of a fine bit of 'real estate'. So, it serves both purposes really.

At this stage of the breeding season, he should already be paired-up but that doesn't prevent him continuing to defend his patch. Indeed, last year I heard males churring right up to the 4th September, when the last of the adults departed the parish for Africa.

Young Blue Tit in Affpuddle
Photo by Helen Frost



### Robin's pincushion

Jane Courtier: These are often found on wild roses in summer, and there seem to be quite a few of them in the parish at the moment. They are caused by a small wasp which lays dozens of eggs in a developing leaf bud. When the eggs hatch, the larvae secrete a chemical that causes the rose to develop a protective woody gall around them, which becomes covered with rather attractive mossy growths that turn from green to red as the summer progresses. The larvae overwinter safely in their galls, and hatch out in the following summer.

Folklore says that the galls have had many uses in the past, particularly against whooping cough but also to treat colic and toothache. They were apparently hung round the neck or carried in the pocket to ward off rheumatism, placed under pillows as a cure for insomnia and sometimes rubbed on the scalp to cure baldness. Even more optimistically, they were said to be carried by schoolboys as a charm against receiving a beating!



Robin's Pincushion Photo by Jane Courtier

### Marsh Helleborine in the parish – a follow-up

*Ian Cross:* It seems Sue Taylor's amazing record of the Marsh Helleborine (see newsletter 2023/12) is more significant than we thought. Not only is it a first for the parish but, according to the Plant Atlas 2020, it has never previously been recorded in the entire SY89 10 km square!

For wildlife recording purposes, most organisations map our fauna and flora using the 10 km squares of the national grid. Each square covers an area of ten by ten kilometres – that means an impressive 100 square kilometres in all.

These are identified by a pair of letters and a two-digit number. Our parish lies almost entirely in square SY89 (though bits are in squares SY79 and SY88).

The parish plant list now has records for 13 species of orchids, though about a third of these haven't been recorded since the 1980s and 90s. That doesn't necessarily mean that they are extinct in our area. It just reflects how capricious orchids can be: often mysteriously appearing as if from nowhere, flowering for a few seasons, then disappearing again for many years.



Marsh Helleborine flower in close-up. Photo by Ian Cross.

### **Scarce Chaser and other updates**

Adrian Middleton: Towards the end of June, I was out of the parish when I saw this Emperor Moth caterpillar, apparently basking, on a bare patch amongst heathland. It became rather fidgety, so I took quite a while to photo it as it wandered around.



Emperor Moth caterpillar Photo by Adrian Middleton

That was rewarding but my focus was on some heathland within the parish. I really wanted to see how a particular adder was getting on but on the way I had to take a walk of about a mile or so along a woodland track where there was a lengthy ditch full of water. Ahead of me there was an expanse of yellow flowers including bog asphodel and various trefoils interspersed with the pale purple of spotted orchids. There were blue damselflies and skimmers flying back and forth too. Also, there were some friendly folk about, whether walkers or workers, adding to the interest.

Eventually I reached my intended destination where I saw both Common and Silver-studded Blue butterflies, the latter having broad black edges to its wings and the silvery blue spots on the underwings, both features missing on the Common Blue. It wasn't long before I found a large green Grass Snake which I thought I recognised. Also, in the same area I saw an adult female Adder

basking on a patch of moss amongst some purple flowering heathers. But it wasn't the one I was looking for, and in fact was a new acquaintance. It didn't stay around long.



Bog Asphodel Photo by Adrian Middleton

So, on I went. I soon took a break on a familiar pile of logs and was rewarded with a sighting of my quarry, a familiar large adult female Adder. Its colour was now a richer reddish brown. The zig-zag pattern on its back bore a close resemblance to that when photo'd a month or so ago. Its eyes were pink-coloured, not quite as red as I had hoped, but this time its elliptical black pupils were evident. It would be nearly a month now since it had cast its old skin. But there was a surprise for me when quite nearby I saw an unfamiliar looking dragonfly resting on a twig. It was unperturbed by my presence. Checking my

photo of it with friends later, it proved to be a Scarce Chaser. I'm told these frequent several of our Dorset rivers and it would appear they are less rare than the name might suggest they once were, but it was a new species for me.



Scarce Chaser dragonfly Photo by Adrian Middleton

lan Cross: This is an example of a very unusual phenomenon seen in both this species and the Broad-bodied Chaser. This adult is developing a touch of bluish colouring (or pruinescence) on the abdomen. Normally, blue is the distinguishing feature of the male, and the female remains brown. However, if a female becomes very, very mature she will sometimes develop traces of male colouration. You can tell this female has been around for some time by the wear and tear on her wing tips.

Adrian Middleton: A couple of days later I ventured out onto another area of parish heathland with Ben Limburn of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC). I had not been in this part for some fifteen years. It was very warm but before long we were lucky enough to spot a couple of young female adders in some dense cover. Again there were the two aforementioned blue butterflies and also both Broad-bodied Chaser and Golden-ringed dragonflies near an adjoining pool.

Back home we looked at Small and Large Elephant Hawk and Swallowtail moths amongst a few others.

Time had, as always, gone quickly but no doubt we'll be out on the heath again soon.



Small Elephant Hawk moth Photo by Adrian Middleton

### Photo by Michelle Cross

### **ID Question**

Michelle Cross: Can you tell me what these are please? They are floating on the top of my pond and seem to be insects with a casing of something around them. Sorry the photo is so poor!



*Ian Cross*: They are larvae of the Small China-mark Moth (*Cataclysta lemnata*). Do you have lots of duckweed on the pond surface? The tiny moth caterpillars build floating cases from fragments of duckweed.

Michelle Cross: That's quite possible as there was a lot of duckweed but I noticed that most of it had gone recently. About the same time as I noticed loads of these larvae. Interesting.

Small China-mark adult moth
Photo by Ian Cross



# Making good use of the garden furniture



Female house sparrow and fluffy fledgling 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 2023/14 20 July 2023



Honeybee on Bramble Photo by Jane Courtier

# **Bramble flower visitors**

Jane Courtier: A Honeybee was busy gathering more pollen to add to the already bulging pollen sacs on her legs. Just below the Honeybee, the Bramble

flowers have been attracting many butterflies, including this Red Admiral who seemed to pause to spread his wings and enjoy the sunshine for a while. I was able to get close enough to admire his very nattily striped antennae, something I'd never noticed before



Red Admiral Photo by Jane Courtier

### Hornet – master butcher

Ian Cross: If I had come across the scene a few minutes later, I would have assumed the hornet was simply a scavenger, having made a lucky find. However, I witnessed the entire drama from beginning to end: an example of the astonishing predatory abilities of this, our largest social wasp.

I first noticed a worker hornet as it scrambled across a heap of bracken towards a basking Common Lizard. The lizard vanished but as the hornet took off it launched an audacious attack against a female Golden-ringed Dragonfly perched nearby.

This was no easy victim. The Golden-ringed Dragonfly is amongst our largest: indeed, the female is noteworthy as our longest dragonfly species. The disparity in size can be seen in picture 1. The dragonfly itself is a fierce predator and will sometimes take other dragonflies. Furthermore, she was no feeble, newly-emerged example. The dragonfly's wings were already fully dried and hardened and she would have been capable of fast and manoeuvrable flight.



Picture 1: The female Golden-ringed Dragonfly is our longest species and dwarfs her assailant. Photo by Ian Cross.

I'm not sure whether the hornet actually intercepted the dragonfly in flight or just as it took off – things happened so fast. In seconds the two of them were battling on the woodland floor in a ferocious clatter of buzzing and battering wings, the hornet repeatedly jabbing with its sting. Eventually, the dragonfly was sufficiently subdued and the real butchery could begin.

I have seen hornets hunting honeybees in the New Forest. Every part of the bee: head, wings, legs, even the abdomen, is surgically severed and rapidly discarded. The hornet is only interested in the thorax with its powerful flight

muscles – protein-rich food for the developing hornet larvae. But this hornet had other ideas, seemingly determined that not a morsel of the dragonfly should be wasted.

She first tried to gnaw through the wing bases but the stout and hardened wing veins proved too tough, even for the hornet's powerful jaws. Next she scooped a big hollow near the base of the abdomen and delved deep into the meaty muscles of the thorax (picture 2). The hornet paused frequently during the whole process to form meat and shell into handy, portable pellets before flying away. I timed the fastest return trip at 2 minutes 22 seconds, so the nest couldn't have been far away.



Picture 2: The best 'cuts' on an insect carcass are the large, powerful flight muscles housed in the thorax. As with any predator, the hornet goes for the best bits first.

Photo by Ian Cross.

The dragonfly's elongated abdomen was rapidly cut into suitable lengths, about two or three segments long. However, the thorax took a little more effort to cut into portions suitable for carrying. At first the hornet seemed to

bite into the dragonfly's exterior shell at random and her powerful 'canopener' jaws could be seen skidding across the unyielding surface. Eventually she found weak points, perhaps at the sutures between the plates of the carapace, and the thorax was carried home in sections.

The dragonfly's head capsule formed a daunting obstacle: an armoured, single-piece globe almost half the size of the hornet herself. After a frankly gruesome attempt to prize away one of the enormous compound eyes, the hornet gave up and opted to carry away the whole head in one piece. This meant a scramble up into the nearby vegetation with her prize and a lumbering, laboured take-off.

Eventually, everything had been ferried back to the nest and all that remained of the dragonfly were the four wings and a scattering of legs. Even the legs were picked over. The hornet manipulated them one by one between her forelegs and mandibles, nibbling at the thicker end. I watched transfixed by this final, macabre display. The scientist in me fighting hard to resist comparisons with a diner at the end of a feast, gnawing on the chicken bones to extract every last fragment of meat. But this was just nature's way of ensuring nothing was wasted.

After an hour or so of butchery, her work done, the hornet vanished on her final flight back to the nest.



# ID Question – what are these?

Submitted by Cari Wooldridge

*Ian Cross*: This is a mating pair of the Spotted Longhorn (*Rutpela maculata*). We have at least 16 species of longhorn beetle in the parish – four of them have this general black-and-yellow, wasp-mimicking colour pattern, so they need a little care in identification.



Photo by Cari Wooldridge

## **Young Tree Pipit**

Helen Frost: Between Affpuddle and Southover there is a spot just out of the woods which is good to see birds. I spotted Tree Pipit and Stonechat there and there were a few youngsters recently. I wonder if this is a young Tree Pipit as its tail does not seem to be developed but I may be wrong?

*Ian Cross:* Probably, this individual is obviously growing-out the tail feathers. However, other reasons for growing new tail feathers can include seasonal moults and replacing them after encounters with predators.



Photo by Helen Frost

## Vagrant Emperor dragonfly new to the parish

The 3rd of April 2023 was a cloudless, calm but cold day. Though not quite cold enough for ice or frost: definitely not the weather you associate with dragonflies. Therefore, my jaw dropped when I saw a dragonfly patrolling a small puddle along the track through Sares Wood.

Not only was the weather less than ideal, but the season was far too early. Our first species of the year, the Large Red Damselfly, wasn't due out for another couple of weeks at least. Furthermore, this wasn't a slender, dainty damselfly I saw but a substantial hawker. These shouldn't be around until well into the following month at the earliest.

What on earth could be abroad so prematurely? Whatever it was, it wouldn't let me anywhere near, let alone close enough for a photo. Eventually it gave up on the puddle and vanished, never to be seen again. All I was left with was the impression of a small hawker, of a nondescript brownish colour. The only feature being a small, contrasting, pale blue 'saddle' at the base of the abdomen.

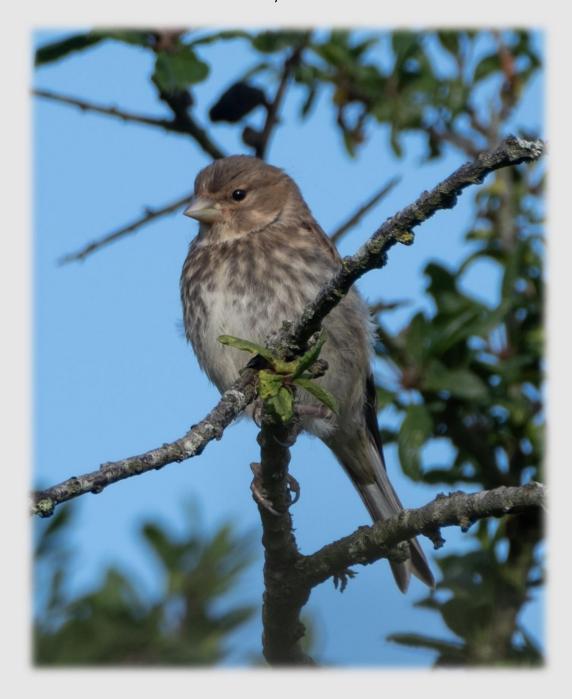
Two scarce migrant species fitted this description but which was mine? I had an inkling which it was, but there was no way of being sure. So I left it at that – a mystery never to be fully solved.

That was until I followed-up on the dragonfly news on my return to the UK. The highlight of the spring was of an exceptional influx to the UK of the Vagrant Emperor (*Anax ephippiger*) in early April. This was the identity of my April hawker!

This is a new species for our area and the 26th dragonfly species to be recorded in the parish. With such a strong influx in the spring (see British Wildlife 34:7 for June 2023) there is a good chance that we may see their descendants in the summer – keep your eyes open.

# **Young Linnet at Affpuddle**

Photo by Helen Frost



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
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Briantspuddle Community Website and we'll sort out a Plan B.

Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter
No 2023/15 28 July 2023

**Budding Naturalist finds Mystery Caterpillar** 

Ian Cross: During a family walk on a visit to Affpuddle, Tom, who was under the expert guidance of Adrian Middleton, spotted an impressive, large caterpillar on the path. This was gathered up on an Aspen leaf and moved to a safe place. Luckily, they had the initiative to photograph it before release. Which was just as well as Tom had found something significant and unusual.



Budding Naturalist Tom, eight years old.
Photo by Elizabeth Whatley



Tom holding Blue Underwing caterpillar

Photo by Charles Ciumei

As it was an unfamiliar species, the photo was sent off for identification. What Tom had found was the caterpillar of the magnificent Blue Underwing moth.

The moth itself is increasing in numbers and regularly turns up in moth traps in the parish. However, the caterpillar is rarely seen and this is the first time it has ever featured in the newsletter.

Sometimes referred to as the Blue Underwing, the Clifden Nonpareil is a very large and impressively beautiful and rare moth.

This unmistakable insect is strongly attracted to sugar at dusk and will come to light but can also be seen by day at rest on tree trunks and walls. It has even been recorded flying inland from the sea.

Winter is spent as an egg on the foodplant with the caterpillars hatching the following spring when they can be found through to July, feeding at night. The pupa is made in a silken cocoon that is spun between leaves or among leaf litter.

https://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/clifden-nonpareil



Blue Underwing moth, also known as Clifden Nonpareil. Photos by Roger Hewitt

### Focus on - Silver-washed Fritillary

lan Cross: This magnificent butterfly is the only Dorset fritillary that remains at all widespread and frequent. The caterpillars feed on violets growing in open woodland and this is essentially a forest inhabitant. However, it is such a mobile, powerfully-flying species, that it can turn up well away from its usual habitats: often sweeping along tree-lined lanes or hedgerows and even visiting mature parish gardens from time to time.

Both the male and female Silver-washed Fritillary are a striking tawny-orange colour marked with black spots. The female (picture 1) is a slightly duller shade of orange-brown when compared with the male and also lacks the black lines of scent scales on her forewing. Otherwise, she is very similar in appearance to the boys.



Picture 1 (Above Left): The 'standard' female is the same tawny-orange as the male Picture 2 (Above Right): The *valezina* form is a steely grey with green or blue hints

Photos by Ian Cross

The males are always the same shade of orange-brown and vary very little. The females, however, come in two very contrasting colour varieties. One is orange like the male, the other is a distinctive shade of silvery-grey (picture 2). The grey form is called *valezina* and is a stunning butterfly. They vary somewhat in the shade of grey and often show hints of steely-green or blue. The underside is also different, with a more pinkish tone than in the normal females. The

colour is controlled genetically and there are no intermediates: females are always obviously normal or *valezina*.

Females of the *valezina* form are rarer than the 'standard' ones, though it's hard to say just how rare they are. They probably form about 5 to 15% of the females in any population and a figure of 10% is often quoted (which I find a suspiciously round number). To me the proportion of *valezina* females in our area seems somewhat higher but this may just be unconscious bias, as you never forget seeing one of these lovely colour forms. They turn up all over the parish and I have even seen *valezina* in our garden. However, Oakers Wood is something of a hot spot and, locally, is the place to go to see this spectacular variety.

There are all sorts of theories and speculation as to how the greyish females behave and interact with males and why they remain relatively rare: neither seeming to increase nor disappear altogether. One thing is clear though: being somewhat different doesn't render them **totally** unattractive to the males. The male in picture 3 is courting a *valezina* female as ardently as he would a standard one!



Picture 3: The colour difference doesn't put this male off from courting a *valezina* female.

Photo by Ian Cross.

**ID Please!**Photos submitted by Susan Puttick



*Ian Cross*: This is the Hornet Hoverfly (*Volucella zonata*). It's our largest hoverfly and now a regular feature of high summer in the parish.

### **Erica Trust Old Quarry**

Lesley Haskins: The old gravel quarry, just above The Hollow Track, was one of the very few open areas in the land we bought from the Estate when we first acquired it. This still open patch is actually just a tiny remnant of the area which was quarried in the past - much of the top of the hill was actually totally removed! But then most of the flattened worked out site was planted with

Corsican and Scots pine which grew up to leave only the small unplanted space of the present quarry area. A small amount of heather and bilberry have hung on in its sunny surrounds. In the base recently I spotted the not so common, Common Centaury - a delightfully delicate pink flowered plant which I sometimes see in the short grassland of acid fields/pony paddocks in southeast Dorset or on grassy bits of proper heathland.



Common Centaury. Photo by Lesley Haskins

Our plan for the worked out area around the quarry is to keep thinning the Corsican pine over time and let the plantation gradually find its own way to a more natural mixed woodland - maybe even being a place where at least some exotic conifers will be allowed to intermingle with natives. There is a permissive path round and through the quarry.



Permissive Path. Photo by Lesley Haskins.

### **Butterflies on Erica Trust Heath**

*Ian Cross*: When first I prepared the butterfly report for Erica Trust Heath the butterfly list stood at 26 species. It has now risen to 30 species, which is an impressive 83% of the 36 species recorded from the parish.

I have seen Silver-studded Blue there for the first time this year. This was a single, dispersive female which was recorded in Smokeham Bottom. This was quite a surprise, as it was not where I expected to see the first individual, which I had thought would be along the newly-mown rides. My intuition is that conditions are not yet quite suitable for this species. However, Smokeham Bottom does have a lot of pioneer clumps of heather among bare ground and in a very hot and sheltered microclimate, so who knows what may come of her visit. I think it will take a while for the mowing and grazing to produce enough short, freshly-sprouting heather regrowth to enable a sufficient density of the

Silver-studded Blue's ant host, *Lasius niger* to become established, before the butterfly gains a permanent foothold.

Whilst on Erica Trust Heath, an even greater surprise was seeing a male Dark Green Fritillary. This is only the second record ever for the parish (and, indeed, only the second for the entire SY89 10 km square since 2000). I'm sure that this magnificent butterfly doesn't breed in our area and that the parish only receives the very occasional wanderer.

## Tom finds moths, butterflies and a legless lizard....



Close-up of Privet Hawkmoth on Tom's hand Photo by Charles Ciumei



Left: Elephant Hawkmoth & right: Pine Hawk Moth.

Photos by Charles Ciumei.



Tom with Privet Hawkmoth in hand Photo by Elizabeth Whatley

Adrian Middleton: People sometimes find it difficult to get on with moths, but Tom had no problem on this count.

The sun was already shining by the time we headed for the house leaving the moths safely behind hidden in the bushes. As we did so we were also to see several garden butterflies including the three commonest white butterflies, the Large White, the Small White and the Green-veined White. There were Peacocks, Gatekeepers, Commas and an elusive Small Tortoiseshell. It was interesting to see several Red Admirals and a Peacock warming up on a Choisya bush before joining others on nearby Buddleias and Hebe flowers to obtain nectar.



Several Red Admirals and a Peacock on Choisya. Photo by Adrian Middleton.

It was a bit strange seeing them basking like this first thing in the morning.

We had some lovely views of garden butterflies and I could tell Tom was pleasantly surprised to have seen some really colourful moths too.



**Comma**Photos
by Adrian Middleton





Gatekeeper Photo by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: The Gatekeeper has a black circle on its underwing with two white spots in it.

Later on we also had a surprise introduction to a legless lizard, the Slow worm, which was found nearby and we had a nice chat about our lizards. So maybe we'll be able to venture further afield and find other reptiles and interesting wildlife out on the heath some time.



Slow worm. Photo by Adrian Middleton.

I certainly won't be surprised if Tom wants to see more of our moths and butterflies, including maybe the Blue Underwing moth itself if we're very lucky. Something we are all looking forward to.

Henry Hogger: I enjoyed Ian's extraordinary account of the hornet/dragonfly battle (newsletter 2023/14). I understand that we haven't had the Asian hornets yet in this country; but I guess it's only a matter of time...

*Ian Cross*: The Asian Hornet has actually been found on a few occasions in mainland Britain but, so far, has been quickly eliminated and failed to establish itself. However, as Henry says, it can only be a matter of time.

### Question: Submitted by Mark Wooldridge

These frogs were in close proximity, but are quite different colours. How much variety of colour is there in amphibians?





*Ian Cross*: The Common Frog has an astonishing range of colour varieties from grey, through all shades of brown, reddish-brown, orange, olive-brown and yellowish. Ironically, the one colour you **won't** see is a brilliant, pure green.

Our European frogs are loosely divided into 'Brown Frogs' and 'Green' or 'Water Frogs'. The former are more terrestrial, spending much of the year outside the breeding season in cool, damp places and includes our species, the Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*).

'Green Frogs' are more aquatic and sun-loving, spending much of the year in the shallows or basking at the water's edge, hence their other name of 'Water Frogs'. They are almost as variable in colour, but bright greens tend to predominate.

#### **ID Question**

#### Submitted by Elizabeth Whatley

Elizabeth Whatley: I had this in my laundry basket recently. I released it outside, but within minutes there it was inside again, so I released it once more. I recently had a broad-bodied chaser in similar circumstances, so all this was just as a matter of routine!

*Ian Cross*: This is a female Golden-ringed Dragonfly (See newsletter 14).



Golden-ringed Dragonfly rescued from laundry basket Photos by Elizabeth Whatley

#### A Southern Hawker dragonfly emerges

Adrian Middleton: A couple of days ago whilst the weather was still sunny and warm, I checked the garden pond only to notice an emerged larva of the Southern Hawker dragonfly clinging to an iris frond, one of many such larvae this year. The main difference was that in reality I was looking at the larval case (exuvia) from which the adult imago was partially emerged and hanging upside down with the abdomen still partially out of sight in the exuvia. How long it had been like this I do not know for sure. I was glad all I did was watch it over

the next ten minutes. There was absolutely no discernible movement and in reality, I had more or less concluded the imago was dead and so that was that.

Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3

Then unexpectedly I noticed the body twitch slightly. So, I waited on, only to see these movements become more regular. I understand now that the legs had been hardening in the quiet spell to deal with what was about to happen. Literally in a mere fraction of a second (the blinking of an eye), barely visible, the insect hauled its head and body forward and upwards enabling it to become upright with its legs now grasping the head end of the exuvia. The head was now up rather than hanging down. This action had initially looked like an impossible feat to accomplish.



Over the following hour or so the wings became fully inflated and dried, and finally after another lapse the adult flew away.

#### Bird Droppings – or are they?



Two bird droppings on the bramble leaves, or are they? Photo by Ian Cross

*Ian Cross*: A leafy woodland edge and a splatter of bird droppings disfigure the fresh green of the young bramble leaves. Two recently-dropped faecal sacs: glossy black and white and with a gleam of moisture. Nothing here to interest a predator (see photo above).

But, look again. These are no bird droppings, but a beautiful little moth with a very fanciful name: the Chinese Character (*Cilix glaucata*). To my mind it's not necessarily the finest mimic of the many moths that copy bird droppings, but it must be the prettiest. The overall pattern of black and white gets the basic colour scheme right. The finishing touch is provided by the little patch of shining blue scales scattered among the black scales of the dark blotch. These give an impression of a gleaming highlight as would be produced by a particularly moist dropping (see photo below).



Master bird-dropping mimic, the Chinese Character moth. The head is to the left and you can just see the tips of its feet poking out from under its wings. Photo by Ian Cross.

These moths fly at night and come freely to light traps but they are rarely found by day. Yet they often sit like these two, brazenly posed in full view. Their little feet tucked in under their wings, they remain absolutely motionless, whatever the provocation, such is the confidence in their deceit. For, although a predator may sample a poisonous moth just the once or readily tucks-in to a feast when it penetrates the camouflage of a cryptic insect, nobody, but nobody, wants to eat a bird dropping.

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



# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/16 3 August 2023

Red Solider Beetles
Photo by Jane Courtier



Jane Courtier: These beetles are commonly known as Red Soldier Beetles (Rhagonycha fulva), but when I checked their identity online I was amused to find they are also now known as Hogweed Bonking Beetles.

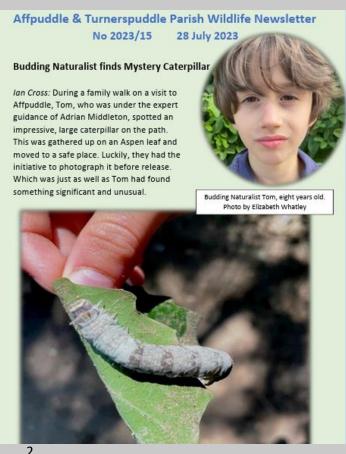
Although these two were on a creeping thistle, they are apparently most often seen on hogweed flowers - but whatever plant they happen to alight on, they will normally be found "doing what comes naturally". Mating is apparently the all-consuming passion of their adult lives, and while a regular food supply is essential to keep their strength up, they often remain coupled together even when feeding. They eat pollen, nectar and soft-bodied insects such as aphids, and their larvae prey on slugs and snails, so they should certainly be popular with gardeners.

The name Hogweed Bonking Beetle apparently started in the 1980s as a joke amongst entomologists, but somehow managed to appear in an official conservation list. Although it was later edited out (it is said that a vicar had complained) it was too late, and the splendidly appropriate name has stuck.

Ian Cross: When I was a lad we always knew these as 'Bloodsuckers' – totally inaccurate and undeserved of course.

#### **Feedback on Newsletter 15** Blue Underwing/ **Clifden Nonpareil**

Jamie McMillan: that lad with a Nonpareil larva was brilliant. The Dorset Moth Group website doesn't have a local photo of one. In fact it might be the first one found in Dorset, as they are said to live right up amongst the treetops. It would be a great addition to the **Dorset Moth Group** distribution map as well.



#### Boom and Bust - the Holly Blue Story

*Ian Cross:* When Gordon Brown intoned those famous words: "no more boom and bust", he probably didn't have the Holly Blue in mind. It would have been a futile proclamation if he had: as the life history of this lovely butterfly is a tale of nothing but ups and downs.

This is probably our easiest blue butterfly to identify, in both sexes. The overall impression is of a bright, clear, slightly pale, sky-blue butterfly, flickering along the tops of the hedges. Unlike all our other blues, the Holly Blue has no brown areas or orange-red markings.



Picture 1: The forewings of the male look as if the very tips have been dipped in black ink.

Photo by Ian Cross

The male is entirely blue above, apart from the very tips of the forewings which look as if they have been dipped in black ink (picture 1). The female is the same colour, though the narrow, black tip is expanded into a broad black smudge that wraps around the front and edge of the forewing, as well as a few black blotches on the hindwing (picture 2).



Picture 2 The female has a broad, black edge to the forewing Photo by Ian Cross

However, this butterfly is probably easiest to identify from below. The underside is an even, chalky-white with a hint of blue. This is marked with a scattering of black spots (picture 3). Nothing else is quite like it: the undersides of most of our blues are pale grey-brown, marked with black spots and a line of orange-red crescents along the margin – totally unlike the ghostly-white of the Holly Blue. Only the rather scarce Small Blue looks anything like it, and that butterfly is entirely brown above, with scarcely a trace of blue.

A feature of many butterflies is that they will sometimes settle at the edges of puddles, or even damp areas along a gravel track, in the full heat of a summer's day. The reason for this is that it's an opportunity to top up on essential minerals from the wet mud. Peer closely and you may even see the proboscis unfurled and probing the moist soil. This is called 'puddling', and Holly Blues seem especially prone to this behaviour. I have sometimes seen small 'clouds' of this species puddling together in particularly long, dry spells. The male in picture 3 is shown in the act of puddling.



Picture 3 - A male 'puddling' at a patch of moist gravel along a woodland track and showing his chalky-white underside with just a hint of blue. Photo by Ian Cross.

So, what about that 'boom and bust'? The life cycle of the Holly Blue is intimately bound up with that of a parasitic wasp which goes by the mouthful of a name: *Listrodomus nycthemerus*. The wasp grubs feed on the developing caterpillar of the butterfly.

At first the population of the butterfly grows and grows, but, as time goes by, more and more caterpillars are killed by the wasps. Eventually, the Holly Blues are overwhelmed and their numbers crash, to the point that they become quite scarce for a few years. This leaves the wasps with nothing to eat and they too, all but vanish. Freed of enemies, the butterflies increase once more and the cycle begins again. The peaks and troughs in numbers are quite regular and take a number of years to come round again.

It seems that this year marks a peak in the cycle. This means that the Holly Blue is noticeably commoner than usual. I am seeing them everywhere in the parish at the moment – often with two or three butterflies around one small bramble

bush. Patches of puddling butterflies are to be found along most damp, sheltered woodland rides.

Indeed, it's impossible to recommend any particular spot to see them. The Holly Blue is a mobile butterfly that doesn't have strict colonies like most blues, so could turn up anywhere. Just spend an afternoon in your garden on a sunny day and one will probably pass through sooner or later. In a reversal of fortunes, Holly Blues even outnumber the Common Blue for the time being. Hopefully, the peak will last another year or more, but all good things come to an end. Enjoy this period of abundance while it lasts!

#### **ID Question**

Excerpt from Newsletter 15 – feature on the Silver-studded Blue butterfly

*Ian Cross*: I think it will take a while for the mowing and grazing to produce enough short, freshly-sprouting heather regrowth to enable a sufficient density of the Silver-studded Blue's ant host, *Lasius niger* to become established before the butterfly gains a permanent foothold.

Jamie McMillan: is Lasius niger the common Black Ant I have in the garden (mostly in the stone paths)?

Ian Cross: The black ant in your garden is almost certainly Lasius niger. I've sampled the ants in the parish at the precise sites where I've watched Silver-studded Blues ovipositing - the mown heather along the pylon traces is a consistently reliable site. I've found Lasius niger to be the Lasius present. This isn't to say that Lasius alienus isn't also used in the parish but I've yet to find it here, so I think we can assume that niger is the main host.

Female Silver-studded Blues can detect the presence of the ants and actively seek out areas where they are active. I suspect that Erica Trust Heath already has the ant - it is after all one of our commonest species. All that is required is for a sufficient ant density to build up and then for a wandering female butterfly to pass through. Hopefully, only a matter of time.

#### **Brown Argus!**



Brown Argus (female) Photo by Jamie McMillan



Brown Argus (female) Photo by Jamie McMillan

Jamie McMillan: The first decent butterfly day for ages and - wham!- a new garden species! I was trying to take pics of the Meadow Vetchling to judge how much it has spread, when I noticed it & thought...surely not? But it was obviously bright enough on the upperside & I managed a shot of the underside just in case, and the spot arrangement confirmed it.

Apart from the vetches, my garden seems all wrong for Brown Argus. Lesley used to have them & I used to see them in very similar habitat at Carey Camp near Wareham: very dry open clearings amongst pines with Storksbill present. I think this is a female from the strong orange spots, but didn't see any egg laying.

Do you know where the nearest ones are? The Culpepper's Dish car park is the sort of place I'd expect them.

*Ian Cross*: Yes, definitely a female.

The nearest to you have been seen in our garden. I grow a lot of Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and we have had small colonies in the past, though not in recent years.

There is a small colony on the Erica Trust Heath where I have seen territorial males and courtship but, so far, not egg-laying. So, the foodplant there is a bit of a mystery.

By and large, though, the caterpillar foodplant locally is Dove's-foot Crane's-bill (*Geranium molle*) - there isn't a lot of Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) in the parish.

Brown Argus has a very interesting variety of caterpillar foodplants. When I first became interested in butterflies in the 1970s it was a matter of Rockrose or Common Stork's-bill and nothing else. However, rising temperatures have enabled the Brown Argus to make a switch to Dove's-foot Cranes-bill and widen its choice of host plants. This has led to a boost in range and numbers in recent years. In the parish it is quite a widespread species, though never numerous, on grassy field margins and track edges on heathland where limestone ballast has enabled a rich flora to develop on the track verges. It is

even found on the edges of arable fields locally, where you sometimes get a dense flush of Cranes-bill seedlings at certain stages in the crop cycle.

There was an item on identifying and sexing Brown Argus in newsletter 2022/44, 18 July 2022.

#### The Limestone Debate

lan Cross: In the past Forestry England have used crushed limestone as track ballast more or less throughout Moreton Plantation and for much of Throop Heath, Bryants Puddle Heath and Affpuddle Heath. It's in such areas that the richest trackside floras are found. As far as I know, there's not much limestone used north of the Throop Clump/Culpepper's Dish road.

Having said that, there's a stretch of limestone for a short distance near the log-stacking area on Erica Trust Heath. This may have been imported for track repairs. Use of crushed limestone is something I would heartily endorse and fully support. It always leads to a massive enrichment of the flora along the track verges - and with this comes a range of rare invertebrates.

There's something of a debate in conservation circles as to whether crushed limestone should be used on heathland. Some take the approach that only local materials like hoggin' should be used. Some, such as Forestry England (FE), would be happy to see limestone continue to be used. From a FE point of view, they prefer limestone as it's cheaper, more durable and forms a sound, all-weather surface – hoggin turns into porridge if you don't get the drainage right. And before I give the impression that FE are only interested in convenience and the bottom line, they also have employees like Mark Warn, working in the parish, who understand and appreciate the benefits to flora and fauna.

So, the debate is still on. From my point of view, I hope the limestone-lovers will prevail.

#### 50 Death Caps in one small space

Photo by Margaret Cheetham



*Ian Cross*: July has been an exceptionally wet month, with our area receiving over twice the average rainfall. Summers like this are not unusual and tend to produce a premature flush of fungal fruiting bodies – over two months ahead of schedule.

I've noticed how this phenomenon doesn't affect all groups of mushrooms and toadstools equally. Prominent at the moment are some of the Amanitas: the

Blusher and the Tawny Grisette are particularly abundant. However, that most famous of Amanitas, the Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) doesn't seem to respond in the same way – I've yet to see a single one!

One Amanita that always features strongly in these early outbreaks is the Death Cap (*Amanita phalloides*) but this year is exceptional. In the photo above I'm standing on the fringes of a massive troop of over fifty fruiting bodies. This is astonishing – in one place and one moment that's almost as many as I would expect to see in the whole parish over the entire autumn!

#### **Toad Rescue**

Margaret Cheetham: with all the rain we've been having, this year's toadlets are everywhere, including places that make them vulnerable to being squashed. This little cute one was found on our driveway and put carefully in the back garden by some log piles.



Toadlet rescued from driveway Photo by Margaret Cheetham

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

## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/17 20 August 2023

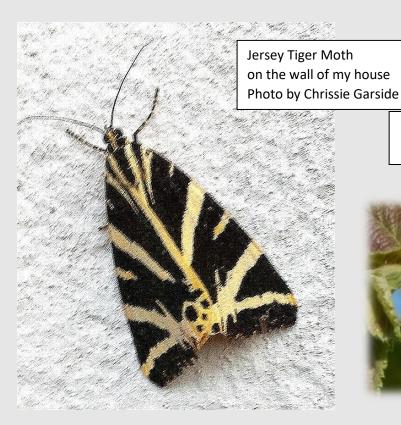
#### **Featuring:**

- Alice in Wildlife Wonderland
- A transformed caterpillar
- A walk on Erica Trust heathland

And much more....

Alice, aged 13 Photo by Caroline Thornton





Jersey Tiger Moth in Affpuddle.
Photo by Helen Frost.



*Ian Cross*: at the beginning of August the Jersey Tiger Moths were everywhere. We were expecting someone to send in a photo eventually!

See below for how this lovely moth looks when its wings are spread.



Jersey Tiger Moth on Canadian Goldenrod Photo by Ian Cross Jersey Tiger Moth on Lavender Photo by Ian Cross



#### **ID Question**

*Pam Taylor*: This butterfly was on the outside of my window when I raised the blind yesterday. Can you tell me what sort it is? Apart from knowing what a red admiral, a comma or a blue or white one looks like, I don't have a clue!



*Ian Cross*: Unfortunately, we're looking at it from underneath. From the pink tinges on the hindwing, I would say Red Underwing Moth.

Pam Taylor: Thanks for the feedback. Maybe I should have popped out in my night clothes to take a pic outside. However, my 11 year old grandson and I were intrigued to watch from indoors as it appeared to be having a good old scratch at its underbody!

#### A wonderful time for a walk on Erica Trust heathland

Lesley Haskins: It's a wonderful time for taking a walk up onto the Erica Trust heathland. This year we have even more heathers and dwarf gorse coming through and the 4 young cattle are doing their very best to give them a boost by eating off the competing purple moor grass - which had done so much better at surviving under the shade of the old conifers. The cattle also help by nibbling off the very many birch and pine seedlings which would otherwise take over. I have been up there pulling some out - and took two photos whilst there.



Photo 1 Photo by Lesley Haskins

The first shows the most extensive of the heathers - common heather or ling. In the background is a little bit of brighter bell heather. Both of these like dry conditions as does the yellow flowering dwarf gorse - not to be confused with the much larger European gorse which has finished flowering now. In the foreground is the soft pink cross-leaved heath which normally likes the ground rather wetter - indeed will become the dominant heather on fully wet ground.

The second photo shows one of our best spreads of bilberry right beside the permissive path that goes into the cattle enclosure at the top of Bladen Valley. There is also a better view of the bright bell heather in this photo. In the background there is some dead European gorse which has been carefully treated with a herbicide.



Photo 2 Photo by Lesley Haskins

We like European gorse as it is great for invertebrates and essential for birds like the Dartford warbler who need their territories to include some nice bushy gorse which gives them an essential place to get food and shelter in the event of a hard snowy winter. But European gorse thrives on soil disturbance and as we have had a lot of that there is a danger it will be too widespread. So we have been treating the more scattered bits but retaining core areas to manage by cutting in rotation in the winter. This bit was treated so stop it spreading onto the bilberry which is rather special. One thing is for certain - there is never a shortage of tasks to carry out on heathland, whatever the time of year.

#### Roe Deer inspects new patio

Photo by Helen Frost



#### Caterpillar Transformations – the Privet Hawk-moth

*Ian Cross*: I was particularly keen to photograph the spectacular caterpillar of the Privet Hawk-moth. Unfortunately, they are unpredictable in their appearance and there's nowhere in the parish where you can absolutely guarantee finding one when you need it. The moths, of course, are regulars at moth traps but few naturalists mention the caterpillar.

While cutting back Guelder Rose in the garden, an attractive, young hawk-moth caterpillar turned-up (picture 1 below). It looked a bit like a Poplar Hawk-moth with its plain green-and-yellow markings and speckling of tiny, yellow bumps. However, something didn't quite feel right, not least of which was the unusual food plant.

I had my suspicions but offered it some tender sallow leaves — usually a perfectly delicious meal for a Poplar Hawk-moth caterpillar. It resolutely refused to touch them. Puzzled, I put it back on the Guelder Rose diet. I knew this was occasionally a host plant for Privet Hawk-moth and my suspicions deepened.

Then came the next change of skin. And what a revelation! There was no doubt about it, the resulting insect was undoubtedly a Privet Hawk (picture 2 below).

Now, if you thumb through the modern field guides to moths or take a quick scroll through the internet, you will find plenty of images that look like picture 2. However, you will be hard-pressed to find pictures of the earlier 'instars' (the fancy term for the stages of a developing insect between each skin change).

The Edwardian entomologists were well aware of this transformation: Richard South's classic text on Moths of the British Isles alludes to this dramatic change in appearance in the text, though he doesn't provide a picture. However, neither of the standard modern field guides to caterpillars – by Jim Porter or by Henwood, Sterling and Lewington – mention this phenomenon. Have we somehow simply forgotten to observe closely?



Above: Picture 1. The mid instar caterpillar is speckled with tiny, yellow bumps but shows no trace of the colours to come. Photo by Ian Cross

Below: Picture 2. In the final instar the skin is smooth, the horn black above and lovely purple stripes have appeared. Photo by Ian Cross



#### Alice in Wildlife Wonderland



Alice, aged 13 Photo by Caroline Thornton

Adrian Middleton: In early August Alice and her family came to Affpuddle. Our excursions were meant to include a visit to local heathland to see reptiles and other wildlife. It was soon obvious that the weather had changed, however briefly, to hot and sunny and that practically all reptiles would, likely as not, have sought shade to compensate for these particularly warm circumstances. Fortunately, Alice had seen some reptiles last August including the Smooth Snake.

With only a short period of time available, we favoured a good look round the garden instead. There was a fair lot going on. It has been a better year for butterflies, and we saw Red Admirals, Peacocks, Commas, Gatekeepers and the commoner Whites seeking nectar on the buddleias. The they were joined intermittently by a Hummingbird Hawk-moth which seemed eager to find every phlox and buddleia in the area.



Comma (above) and Peacock (below) Photos by Caroline Thornton



So we then moved on to the pond where we took advantage of areas of sunshine and shade. Whilst excess blanket weed and fallen walnut tree leaves after the strong winds were raked out, Alice spotted what might be the last Southern Hawker Dragonfly larval exoskeleton on an iris leaf. This was perhaps the last of its kind for this year.



Alice and Southern Hawker larval remains (exuvia)
Photo by Caroline Thornton



Dragonfly larva Photo by Caroline Thornton

Adrian Middleton: I was then able to show them three well- grown Palmate Newts along with lots of newtlets with their tiny legs, and also long tails not to be lost like those of toadlets and froglets about to leave the pond. Then a different amphibian put in a fleeting appearance: it was an adult, brown-

coloured Common Frog which, with a large hop and a splash made good its escape into the water.



Palmate Newtlet on jam jar lid Photo by Caroline Thornton

Finally, a Speckled Wood butterfly, a lover of both the sunshine and shade, appeared and stayed with us for some time, showing both its upper and under sides, posing for a photo every now and again (see below).

Time soon ran out, but we felt good and are looking forward to our next venture to find some more interesting wildlife.



Speckled Wood open and closed wings Photos by Caroline Thornton



#### **Hornet in Affpuddle**

Photos 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.



#### **ID Question**

Submitted by David Leigh-Ewers

David Leigh-Ewers: I saw this caterpillar in the garden today (21 August). It measured 75mm in length and was as fat as a pencil. I went back after a few minutes to try to get a better photo but it had gone. Do you think that it is an elephant hawk moth? I thought it was too late and too large.



Photos by David Leigh-Ewers



Ian Cross: Definitely an Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar and certainly the right time of year for them. Three years ago (edition 2020/148) we wrote an article on the Elephant Hawkmoth, which is repeated below for new readers and those who would enjoy re-reading it.

#### **Caterpillars of the Elephant Hawkmoth**

This is the time of year when caterpillars of the Elephant Hawkmoth come to our attention as they leave their host plant and wander off in search of somewhere to pupate. Their food plants are various willowherbs in the wild though, in gardens, they are usually found on fuchsias.

The full grow caterpillar is a typical hawkmoth, with a small, curved "horn" on its tail (picture 1). Though the horn on the Elephant Hawkmoth larva is a relatively short one compared with many hawkmoth caterpillars.

When the caterpillar is at ease, whilst feeding or on the move, the segments behind the head are fully extended (picture 2). With its grey, wrinkled skin, this gives all the appearance of a miniature elephant's trunk, which may be how this moth earned its name.



Picture 1: The "horn" on the tail is relatively small. Photo by Ian Cross.

If alarmed, the caterpillar withdraws these segments causing the segments behind to puff up. With the large false eyes, this gives the effect of a snakes head (picture 3). This is enhanced by the caterpillar thrashing the head from side to side if further provoked.



Picture 2: When feeding or on the move, the body segments immediately behind the head are stretched out. Photo by Ian Cross.



Picture 3: If threatened, the caterpillar retracts its head to inflate the false "snake head" and eyes. Photo by Ian Cross.

**ID Question**Photos by Cynthia Metcalfe





Cynthia Metcalfe: Do you know what these little chaps will turn into?

*Ian Cross:* Caterpillars of Large White butterfly (*Pieris brassicae*) sometimes known as the Large Cabbage White or simply, Cabbage White. The caterpillars of the Large White are an unmistakeable and common sight wherever brassicas are cultivated, and the bane of gardeners everywhere. They will also eat plants from other families – these are on another garden favourite, Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*).



Caterpillars of Large White butterfly
Photo by Ian Cross

The butterfly's eggs are laid in masses – unlike those of the Small White, which are laid singly – and the caterpillars often congregate in numbers, as Cynthia has discovered. The distinctive yellow-green, speckled with black, pattern also sets them apart from the Small White, whose larvae are an unassuming, plain green.



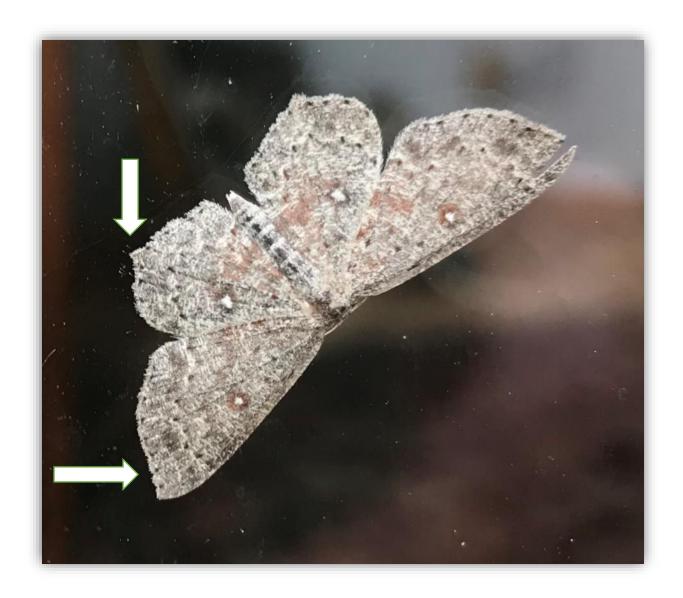
## **ID Question**Submitted by Tasie Russell



Dingy Mocha Photo by Tasie Russell

*Ian Cross*: This is a lovely image of the Dingy Mocha (*Cyclophora pendularia*). As a caterpillar, this rare and declining moth is a specialist of scrubby sallows on damp heathland and is confined to a few, very local and well-demarcated colonies in the parish. However, as an adult, the moth itself very occasionally disperses down into the Piddle Valley, where it becomes the highlight of a moth-trapping session.

There are a few close relatives which need great care to separate. Tasie has managed to capture the two features that confirm this species: the little triangular tooth on the hindwing and the, ever-so-slight, hint of a concavity behind the apex of the forewing (both arrowed below).



#### Dark Adders in the parish

*Ian Cross*: The Adder (*Vipera berus*) has undergone a catastrophic collapse in numbers in recent years, with some alarmist headlines even suggesting they could all but disappear from the British countryside by 2032. As a measure of this decline, I now consider it the rarest snake in the parish. I'm more likely to encounter a Smooth Snake than an Adder these days — a situation that would have been unthinkable when I first became interested in snakes back in the 1970s.

The Adder is very variable in its colour scheme, coming in a variety of shades of brown, reddish or pale grey but always with a contrasting, dark zig-zag along

the back. In the melanic variety, the background colour is as dark as the zig-zag, which all but disappears, giving an almost totally black animal. (Though a sharply-contrasting whitish area usually remains along the lower jaw).

Such individuals are commoner in certain areas – the New Forest is a particular stronghold – and one of my ambitions, still not realised, has been to find a totally black Adder in our area.



Picture 1: A beautiful, very dark female Adder photographed in the parish

Photo by Ian Cross

This beautiful female, which I encountered recently in the parish, is the closest I've found to a truly black one (picture 1). Her background colour is a lovely deep, deep, steely-grey, against which the black zig-zag is scarcely visible. But visible it still remains — in a truly melanic form, you would have to peer very closely to see any trace of the markings at all.

As I say, I've yet to find one in this locality – the black Adder in picture 2 (below) was photographed in the New Forest.



Picture 2: To show a true 'melanic' Adder,
I had to cheat and use this photo from the New Forest. Photo by Ian Cross

# **ID question**Submitted by Phil Ventham



The chrysalis of the Red Admiral, with its little patches of 'gold'

Ian Cross: This unusual object was brought to me by Phil Ventham for identification. It was immediately recognisable as a chrysalis of the Red Admiral butterfly. The pupae of the nettle-feeding species that form such an important component of the butterflies that grace our gardens in late summer and autumn aren't widely known, so it was a pleasure to see one.

On close inspection, chrysalises are things of subtle beauty. On this species the spikes and humps look as if they have been picked-out by little splashes of metallic, gold paint. As ever in nature, this is not mere ornament – there is a reason for everything – though, quite what the idea is here isn't fully understood. One theory is that it's a form of camouflage: the shiny spots reflecting the light, like little drops of gleaming morning dew on what looks like an inedible, dead leaf.

2023 has been a particularly good year for this charismatic butterfly. It became the dominant species on Buddleia in July and August: often outnumbering all other butterflies combined. By late August I was finding the caterpillars everywhere, including in our garden. They weren't immediately obvious though, as each one was safely tucked-up in a little 'envelope' of nettle leaf. Newsletter 2022/57 has an article all about how the nettle-feeding caterpillars achieve this.

#### The Bagworm

Adrian Middleton: Out on heathland the other day searching for reptiles, Ben, a sharp-eyed fellow naturalist called me over and quite unexpectedly placed a tiny poorly-defined object in the palm of my hand. It looked like a clump of old bits and pieces stuck together, whether by accident or design.

I had no idea what was going on, but I paid great attention to the gift presented to me. After staring at it for about a minute I noticed it moved forward ever so slightly so there was something more going on than I had imagined.

Out of one end of what was a well-constructed home including a mixture of small objects such as seeds the head and legs of a very slender caterpillar slowly appeared (as can just be seen in the photograph below).



Bagworm Photo by Adrian Middleton

This was a bagworm, the first I have ever seen. The worm is really a caterpillar, its home a silk cocoon disguised by the bag of "detritus" on it, vaguely reminiscent of the rather similar ruses of the water-bound caddis fly larva.

I was soon reading up in my book on micromoths by P Sterling and M Parsons to realise bagworms are themselves micro-moths. Their life cycles vary considerably between our twenty or so species. There may be flying males and females or sometimes just females reproducing without involving fertilisation (parthenogenesis). I read that one devoted female of the species retains the eggs and caterpillars in her body and eventually dies enabling the caterpillars to feed on her remains. In another case the egg-bearing female, forsaking camouflage to resemble an attractive maggot for birds and reptiles to eat, move on, and void the bagworm eggs in their faeces, so enabling it to spread more widely. Incidentally of our species the Large Bagworm favours heathland.

I do wonder which my species was, given that even the bag on their backs varies a lot in shape and size.

And so, the story goes on. Perhaps I shall be more on the lookout for bagworms in the future.

Ian Cross: Theoretically, it's possible to identify bagworms from their cases which vary in size, cross-section, choice of material and how the bits are arranged. I ran this case through a key to bagworm cases but, without being able to examine it closely, I couldn't come to any definite answer.



**Tom returns to Affpuddle** 

Tom Photo by Elizabeth Whatley

Adrian Middleton: Tom and his family made a welcome return to Affpuddle at the end of August following up his earlier visit when he discovered the caterpillar of the Clifden Nonpareil moth.

On a further visit Tom saw colourful moths such as the Brimstone. However, the orange red, with black spots, on the underwings of a couple of Jersey Tigers he found especially appealing. We also had a close-up view of an Oak Bush-cricket, a regular over the years with its striking long antennae contrasting with the shorter ones on grasshoppers.

Brimstone Photo by Adrian Middleton





Jersey Tiger Photo by Adrian Middleton



Oak Bush-cricket Photo by Adrian Middleton

Tom's visit to our parish this time was very enjoyable but it was over far too quickly. Hopefully he will return again soon with his family and see some more of our interesting wildlife.

## **Spotted Flycatchers in Affpuddle**



Spotted Flycatcher with wasp Photo by Helen Frost



Spotted Flycatcher Photo by Helen Frost

#### Wryneck

Jane Courtier: When out for my walk today I heard a rather unusual bird call and managed to capture it on my Merlin bird app. The app immediately identified it as a wryneck, though (as usual) I never caught sight of the bird to help confirm it!

On looking up the wryneck it certainly seemed possible, as the Woodland Trust says it is "most often encountered during migration in September and October when birds from Scandinavia head to Africa for the winter....mostly spotted along the south and eastern coasts of England".

However, the website also says "You're unlikely to hear a wryneck in Britain" which made me wonder if that was really what I heard. The Merlin app also marked it with a red spot, meaning rare. The call was quite distinctive but bore similarities to that of a green woodpecker - which would not be surprising as the wryneck is a member of the woodpecker family.

I wondered if anyone more expert than me (not difficult!) had seen or heard a wryneck in our area?

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.

# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/19 19 September 2023



Mating Slugs Photo by Lesley Haskins

Lesley Haskins: Walking along the Forestry England roadside ride when the weather cleared a bit the other early evening my eye was caught by what I initially assumed must be a bit of blue litter. But on closer inspection I found it was two slugs. Jamie looked it up on the internet for me and so I now know that they were engaged in mating.

*Ian Cross*: This species of slug is an *Arion ater* agg\* and the blue parts are the penis of each slug. Most terrestrial molluscs are hermaphrodites so, in this mating pair, each slug plays the role of both male **and** female simultaneously. A sensible arrangement that makes finding a sluggy partner so much easier.

\*The "agg" means aggregate and refers to the fact that this is a complex of at least five species. These can only be separated with confidence by dissection. Each of the species is very variable in colour. An interesting thing about this photo is that it shows individuals of two colour forms of the same species mating. At least that's the most likely interpretation, although you can never rule out hybrids in this very closely-related group.



Willow Warbler at Moreton
Photo by Helen Frost

**Common Frog**Photo by Adrian Middleton



Adrian Middleton: It seems likely this brown Common Frog which I saw very recently is the one we saw very briefly with Alice\* when inspecting the garden pond a couple of weeks ago. There was a less colourful frog there too which looked very green, but only because it was covered in blanket weed!

<sup>\*</sup>See newsletter 17 on 20 August 2023 for Alice in Wildlife Wonderland.

#### **Feedback from Newsletter 18**

Henry Hogger: Re Tasie's Dingy Mocha, I attended an interesting on-site meeting a few years ago with people from Forestry England, Natural England and Phil Sterling, former Dorset County Ecologist and now I believe working with a moth-focussed NGO, to discuss ways of protecting the sallow that Ian refers to as their habitat from munching cattle, which were about to be introduced on my little patch of heathland and the much larger FE bit across the road. There was talk of fencing off a piece of ground on my patch; but nothing seems to have come of it - and the sallow is still there along the roadside.



Ian Cross: Dingy Mocha caterpillars are relatively easy to find. Here is one happily at home on its preferred food plant, Common Sallow (Salix cinerea)

Henry Hogger: Incidentally, I was pleased to see Helen Frost's action shot of a spotted flycatcher consuming a wasp. Having recently had a wasp nest dealt with under the eaves of a lean-to roof, and probably like others still being

plagued with the odd one, I wonder if anyone can suggest a ruse for attracting flycatchers into the garden?!

Cynthia Metcalfe: Lots of interesting info. I was interested to read that this has been a good year for Red Admirals. I'd noticed that there have been a lot of them on the Buddleias in my garden and my neighbour's too. I'd normally expect to see more Peacocks. I was also interested to read about the black adders; I hadn't realised there was so much colour variation in them.

#### **Asian Hornet**

Alan Rowse: I hope you are keeping well and many thanks for your Parish Newsletters. A special request! I have been keeping honey bees for several years and finding them fascinating to work with. Would Ian be interested in creating an article which focuses on identifying the Asian Hornet (plus how to report sightings).

I guess we will have to adapt to the presence of the Asian Hornet and let evolution take its course.

*Ian Cross*: As of today (8<sup>th</sup> September) 42 Asian Hornet (*Vespa velutina*) nests have been found in 35 localities in the UK this year. Most were in Kent but Dorset wasn't spared. Apparently, two nests were found and destroyed on Portland. This doesn't bode well for our attempts to keep this invader at bay.

I am familiar with this species on the continent but have yet to see it in the UK. At a glance, the Asian Hornet is a very different insect to our native European one. The Asian species appears very dark, being an overall deep, velvety brown-black, with a single orange-yellow band. Our hornet is a lot lighter, being mainly yellow and chestnut-brown. However, for identification, I can do no better than attach this link below which covers all the best id features.

ID Vespa velutina Asian Hornet 5.0-1.pdf (nonnativespecies.org)

#### Dove's-foot Cranesbill – a choice among foodplants

*Ian Cross:* Of the eight species of crane's-bill and stork's-bill found in the parish, Dove's-foot Cranesbill (*Geranium molle*) is one of our loveliest and most frequent. It's a common and widespread plant in our area, preferring dry, well-drained sandy or chalky soils. I find it equally at home in turf, where that has become worn and abraded; waste ground; or even the edges of arable crops.

It has attractive flowers, which are usually pale pink, although a white form grows near Briantspuddle parish notice board. Its signature is the neat, round leaves, which are divided to roughly half-way into broad, wedges (picture 1). The developing seed pods - just visible in the picture - have a swollen base and a long, tapering, protruding bit. This is the 'cranes bill' of its common name.



Picture 1: The cheerful, bright-pink flowers and characteristic leaves of Dove's-foot Cranesbill. Photo by Ian Cross

It just so happens that this dainty plant is the food plant of choice for one of our smallest parish butterflies, the Brown Argus. This is a favourite of mine, though I'm hard-pressed to say exactly why. The Brown Argus is technically one of our 'blues'. However, rather perversely, neither sex has even the slightest hint of blue anywhere on their wings. This is the 'blue' without any blue!

The female in picture 2 has settled on a flower to refuel during a bout of egglaying. She fills her 'tank' with nectar, ready for the next fluttering, low flight among the scattered clumps of Dove's-foot Cranesbill.



Picture 2: A female Brown Argus pauses to refuel with nectar during a bout of egg-laying.

Photo by Ian Cross

The female Brown Argus is extremely choosy about which plant she lays her eggs on. Not any old plant will do. Instead, she singles out the tiniest, freshest young seedlings. These may consist of just one or two tender leaves. Potential homes for the caterpillars are carefully inspected with her antennae. When she finds the right plant, she settles and curves the tip of her abdomen under the edge of a leaf, depositing a single egg, safe and out of sight (picture 3). Where conditions are right, dense thickets of crane's-bill seedlings will sometimes sprout. The butterflies prefer areas where the vegetation is sparse and bare ground can be seen among the delicate young leaves (picture 4). This

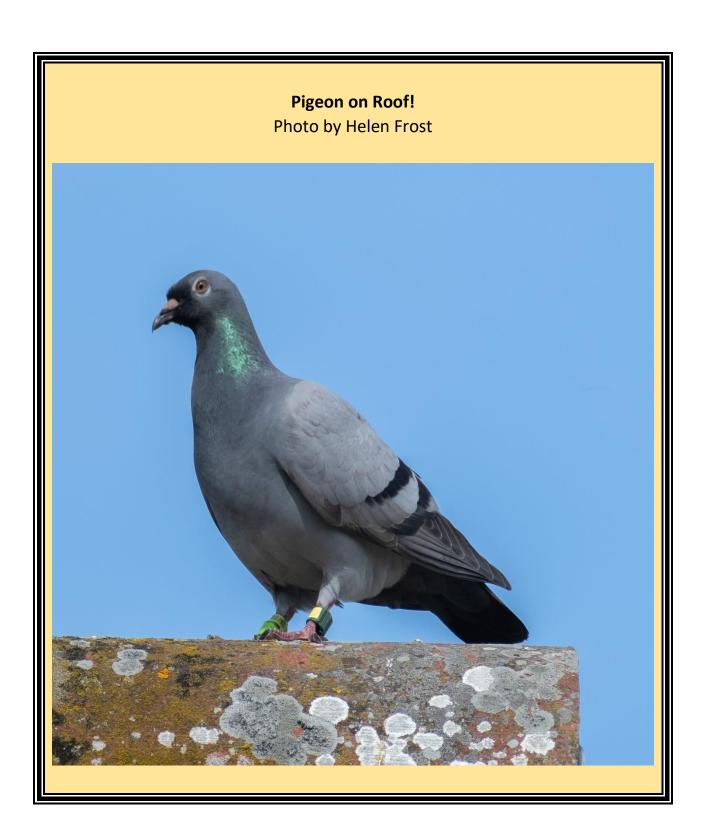
gives the developing caterpillars an extra boost of reflected heat – absolutely essential in our contrary climate.



Above - Picture 3: A Brown Argus bends her abdomen under a leaf of a tiny cranesbill seedling to deposit a single egg. Photo by Ian Cross

Below - Picture 4: A 'thicket' of Dove's-foot Cranesbill seedlings on otherwise bare, warm ground – ideal conditions for breeding Brown Argus butterflies. Photo by Ian Cross.





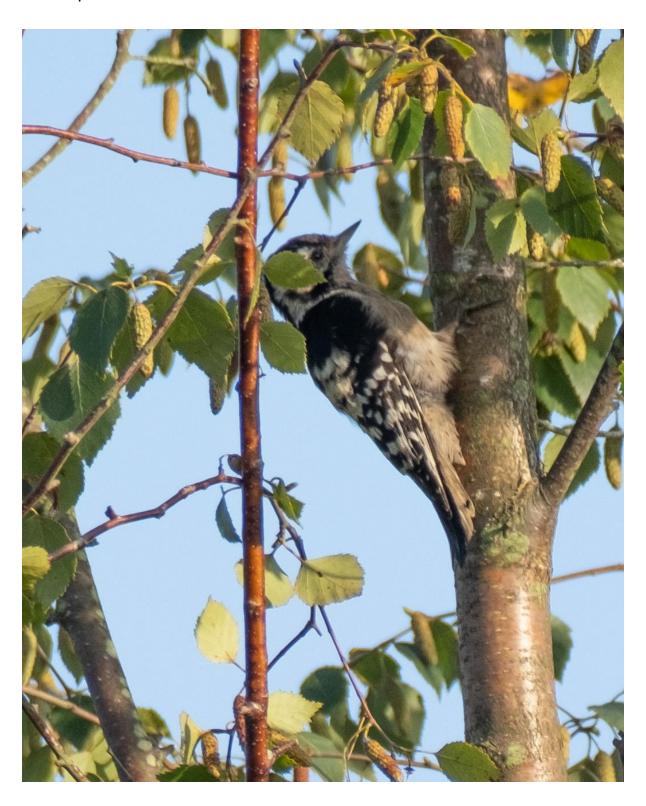
## **Female Wasp Spider** Photo by Adrian Middleton



## **Spotted Woodpecker**

Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: My first Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - a female - at Oakers Wood on 9 September.



#### **ID Question**

Julian Francis: Could I have an ID please? The body length was about 10mm.



*Ian Cross*: This is one of our damsel bugs. They are 'true bugs', members of the order Hemiptera. This group, the family Nabidae, are predatory species on other insects. The sucking mouthparts have been converted into a powerful, piercing, curved 'beak', which is hidden under the insect's head, so not visible in this photo. This species is the Tree Damsel Bug (*Himacerus apterus*).

#### Revisiting an old haunt

Adrian Middleton: A few weeks ago, on a regular walk I spotted this insect, at first glance simply a small grey streak about 12 mm long. It is unlikely I would have seen at all had it been resting on heather but fortunately it had chosen to land on a rusty old tin. A closer look at the photo I took proved it to be a rather

colourful young Mottled Grasshopper. This species apparently likes open stony heathland.

*Ian Cross*: Not so young really - this is a fully adult female! Don't be misled by the small size: it's not an indication of an immature individual, this just happens to be the smallest grasshopper species in the parish. The males are even smaller.



Mottled Grasshopper Photo by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: I was really heading to a familiar haunt in the parish to see how the Adders there were doing. I was soon pleasantly surprised to see three Adders together, two females and one male. I have still to check whether I have seen one of the females before, but it seems probable. The photos include one showing all three Adders. Another shows the male and a female Adder and a third the male with its pure black zig-zag stripe. It is a good while since I saw three Adders together anywhere, so this was good news, given the reported serious decline in Adder numbers.



A male and 2 female adders Photo by Adrian Middleton



A male and female Adder. Photo by Adrian Middleton



The male adder Photo by Adrian Middleton

I was soon also to see a Small Skipper nectaring on teasel quite near fine stands of Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*). There was an Emperor dragonfly darting about in this area of dry heath along with one or two toadlets, nearly underfoot.



Ling Photo by Adrian Middleton

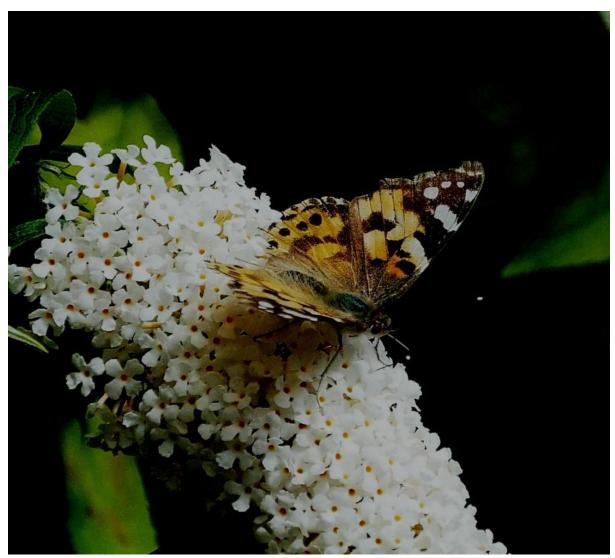


Bell Heather Photo by Adrian Middleton

When I finally reached home, the many butterflies on white buddleia included a Silver-washed Fritillary, showing the silver washes on its underside and also a Painted Lady, rather battered maybe as a result of wild wet weather or long-distance travel.



Silver-washed Fritillary Photo by Adrian Middleton

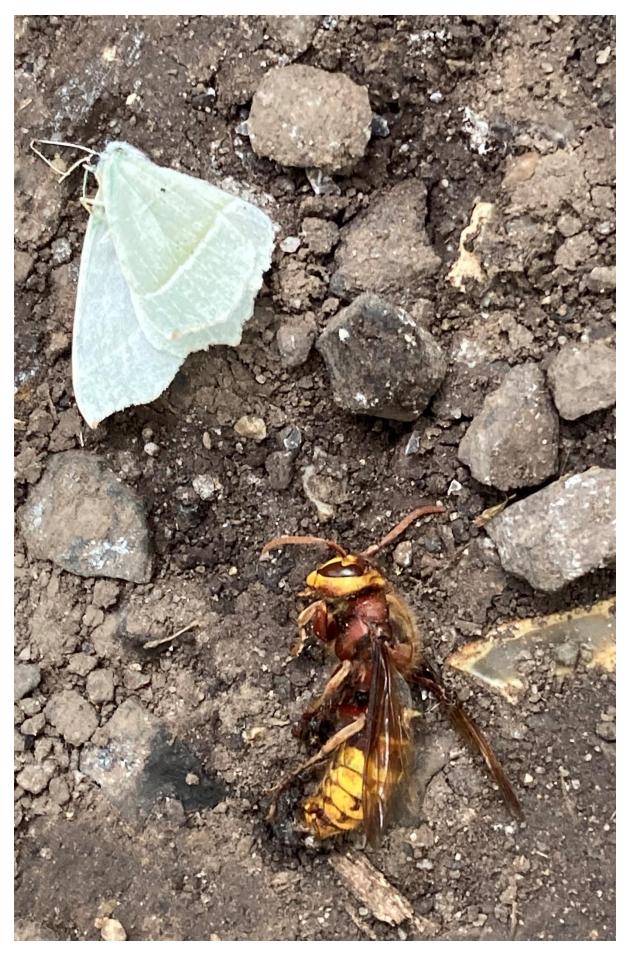


Painted Lady Photo by Adrian Middleton

#### **Hornet and Prey?**

Helen Frost: Whilst walking at Moreton today, I spotted this pair on the ground. I wondered what the story was - had the hornet stung its prey (I gather they don't die on doing so) and or had they both fallen victim to the recent group of running soldiers who had just passed by ... or something else ...

lan Cross: You're right: hornets don't die when they sting. They are very adaptable and opportunistic predators, so they would happily kill and consume a moth if they found one. The victim is a Light Emerald moth (Campaea margaritata). As for what killed the hornet, I can't make out the print of a size 12 army-issue boot, but your theory is as good as any.



#### Sick or injured hedgehogs

Linda Holmes has asked if we could incorporate advice from the RSPCA on sick hedgehogs, as per link on the next page. Here are the salient parts:

Hedgehogs are nocturnal and will hunt at night when their prey is most active. You might see one during the day if their nest has been disturbed or if they're struggling to find food, particularly during dry weather. However, seeing a hedgehog during full daylight can be a sign that they are sick or injured.

#### How to tell if a hedgehog is sick or injured

The hedgehog is probably fine if it seems healthy and active and the weather isn't particularly cold. Offer them a little food and water and then leave them alone but monitor them from a distance.

#### The hedgehog is probably sick or injured if

- There is an obvious sign of injury (like a cut or broken leg)
- It doesn't seem interested in the food you've put out
- The hedgehog is staggering, wobbly, walking around in circles or lethargic
- You can see a large number of flies or ticks on the hedgehog
- You can see any maggots or fly eggs on the hedgehog
- The hedgehog does not roll up or try to roll up when you approach or touch
   it

#### You should also help hedgehogs if

- The weather is cold regular ground frost, snow, or temperatures are at or below freezing for several days
- It weighs less than 300g (about the size of an apple)
- It is in immediate danger, for example on a road

If you're not sure then please <u>contact a local wildlife rescue centre</u> for more advice.

#### What to do with a sick or injured hedgehog

If it's safe to catch and handle the hedgehog then, wearing thick gloves or using a folded towel, gently pick it up. Place it into a secure high-sided cardboard box, lined with a towel. You might also find that gently throwing a towel over the hedgehog causes it to curl up, making it easier to catch.

Then, take the hedgehog to a wildlife rescue centre. If you can't do this immediately keep the hedgehog somewhere warm and quiet indoors, and offer them a small amount of suitable food and water. Unfortunately, a lot of the time, sick or injured wild animals are in a very bad state by the time they can be caught, and the kindest thing for the vet to do is to put the animal to sleep, so please be prepared that they may need to take that difficult decision.



A rescued hedgehog

#### **Keep in mind**

- Always wear gloves if you have to handle a hedgehog, as they can carry diseases like ringworm and salmonella bacteria which can be passed to humans.
- Don't handle the hedgehog any more than you need to because contact with humans will be stressful for them.
- Hedgehogs from the same litter can be kept in the same box if it's big enough.

#### What to do if you find a dead hedgehog

If you find a dead hedgehog, please report it to the <u>Garden Wildlife Health</u> project.

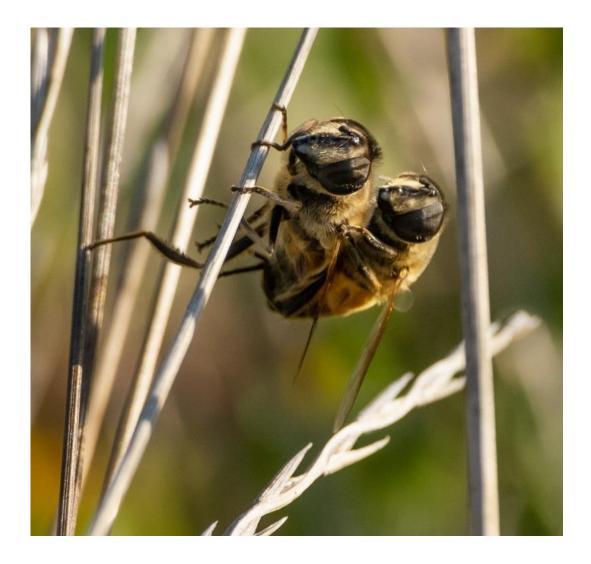
If you find one during the breeding season, watch out for any orphaned hoglets nearby. Find out what to do if you find orphaned hedgehogs.

https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/hedgehogs/injured?utm\_source=BuzzLite\_150 92023&utm\_medium=email&utm\_content=body\_hero\_button1&utm\_campaign=BuzzLite\_1509202 3&campaigncode=23STNFDICAKN1

#### Doing their bit for the species

Helen Frost: But which species? Are they Honey Bees?

*Ian Cross:* Hoverflies – genus *Eristalis*.



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 2023/20 29 October 2023



Brown frog in Briantspuddle Garden
Photo by Jean McGrorty

#### Do you grow Box in your garden?

*Ian Cross*: If you have a box hedge or grow specimen box trees in your garden, you may be playing host to one of our latest invasive species – the Box-tree Moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*).

This moth originates in the far east of Asia: its native range including China, Korea and Japan. However, it has been widely spread around the world: mainly transmitted in its early stages by the horticultural trade.

The first adult moth appeared in the UK in Kent in 2007, and by 2011 it was proved to be breeding, with caterpillars being found in the home counties. From there, Box-tree Moths spread north and west and it is now widely established across England and Wales, with some even reaching Scotland and Ireland.

Dorset was inevitably part of this invasion front. Adult moths have been turning up in moth traps in our area, often in numbers when there have been waves of migrants – thanks to Julian for details. It has now been proven to breed in our parish. I have seen caterpillars in locations as widely scattered as Briantspuddle and just across the parish boundary near Turnerspuddle.

If you don't own a moth trap, it is still quite easy to find evidence of its presence by looking for the caterpillars. Now, the Box-tree Moth is generally regarded as being one of the many moths known as 'micros'. Despite this, the caterpillar is surprisingly large and spectacular. It can grow to about 4cm and has an attractive pattern of black, yellow and lime green (picture 1). In many ways it is reminiscent of the caterpillar of the Large white butterfly.



Picture 1 - Caterpillar of the Box-tree Moth – surprisingly large and colourful Photo by Ian Cross

The Box-tree Moth has been causing quite a lot of consternation in the gardening community. The feeding signs of the growing caterpillars can be readily spotted from a distance. Nibbled leaves quickly turn brown and are usually festooned with caterpillar silk 'webs', liberally scattered with accumulating droppings (picture 2). The whole effect is very unappealing if you insist on neatly-trimmed, fresh green foliage. Indeed, in some areas they have been known to defoliate the bushes.



Picture 2 - Feeding signs: brown, nibbled leaves and caterpillar webs looking like silken hammocks scattered with droppings

Photo by Ian Cross

So, if you grow box in your garden it might be worth examining the bushes for evidence of this 'beast from the east'. If you find some, take a photo and let me know the details.

**ID Question**Photo submitted by Henry Hogger



Henry Hogger: One for ID (on our back door this evening – 21 September): not a brilliant pic, I'm afraid, but quite pretty. Almost translucent, with patterns round the wing edges rather like the decorations around an old parchment. Approximately 2.5 cm (1 inch) across.

*Ian Cross*: Appropriately enough, this is a Box-tree Moth! And here's another from Graham Ogle (below).



### **Box Bug**

*Ian Cross:* Talking of insects associated with Box, another recent arrival in the parish is the Box Bug (*Gonocerus acuteangulatus*) – see picture below. This forms a useful link between the item on the Box-tree Moth and Chrissie Garside's ID query below.

The Box Bug was once the great rarity of British entomology. The <u>only</u> place to see it in the entire country was, appropriately enough, Box Hill in Surrey. Here it lived exclusively on the Box trees that gave the hill its name – so the bug's common name was doubly appropriate.



The Box Bug, a recent coloniser in the parish. Photo by Ian Cross

Then, like so many insects, climate change gave it an opportunity to spread. It is now found widely across southern Britain and has even been found as far west as Devon. Part of its success was that, as it spread, it was able to switch its foodplants to more widespread species like Hawthorn and Buckthorn.

The result of this is that, in the parish I have found it on Hawthorn but it seems that the one species you won't find the Box Bug on – is Box!

This is another species to look out for in the parish. But beware, It does have a look-alike that is extremely common – the Dock Bug (*Coreus marginatus*). So, if you think you've seen a Box Bug, take a photo and send it in for confirmation.

**ID Question**Photo submitted by Chrissie Garside



*Ian Cross*: this is the Western Conifer Seed Bug (*Leptoglossus occidentalis*) yet another in the tide of colonising species aided and abetted by global warming.

**ID Question**Photo submitted by Derek Ralls



*Ian Cross:* This is a Speckled Wood. This is the last of our non-hibernating butterflies to appear each year. I often find one occupying a territory in a sheltered patch of sunshine well into October. Indeed, last year, the final Speckled Wood of the season was seen in the parish on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November!

**ID Question**Photo (next page) submitted by Anne Colquhoun



Anne Colquhoun: I came across this little snake on our front drive - I've never seen one like it before. I'm thinking it might be a ring neck snake (though it's a

long way from its country of origin!). It was about 6 - 8 inches in length. It kindly obliged by slithering onto a spade and we then put it in the undergrowth. I would love to find out more about it, and if they have been seen locally.

*Ian Cross:* This is a juvenile Grass Snake. They are often quite dark at this age and the contrasting yellow collar shows quite well. You can see how they get their older country name of Ringed Snake.

There <u>is</u> a 'Ring-necked Snake' *Diadophis punctatus* from North America, which is commonly kept as a pet. It does look remarkably similar to our Grass Snake - an example of 'convergent evolution', whereby two unrelated organisms independently evolve a similar pattern or shape as they have the same lifestyle.

### **Devils Coach-horse**

Jamie McMillan: I was excited to see this scuttling across the floor near my cat bowls. I have never seen one before in Dorset, though they were quite numerous where I grew up in London. A guaranteed place for them in winter was the side of the emptied school swimming pool.



Devils Coach-horse. Photo by Jamie McMillan.

*Ian Cross*: For more information, there was an article about this impressive beetle last October in newsletter 2022/62

### Juvenile spotted flycatcher at Moreton

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.

## Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/21 4 November 2023

Rainbow over heathland (below) while Eli (right) visits the parish again Photos by Sam Spencer



### This season's species: Scaber-stalked Boletes

*Ian Cross*: The genus *Leccinum* is quite distinctive among the boletes (the chubby fungi with pores under the cap instead of gills). They all share a common feature: a rough, ridged or scaly stem, the scales standing out as a dark, speckled network against the pale stems.

Leccinum doesn't seem to have a widely accepted collective name for the group. They tend to be called 'Boletes' but then, so are virtually all the mushrooms in the family Boletaceae, including lots of other species that aren't Leccinum, so it's not much use as an exclusive name. However, recently I came across the name 'Scaber-stalk', which is a bit ugly but fairly descriptive, so I adopted it gratefully.

There are at least four Scaber-stalks in the parish. They are related to that famous edible mushroom, the Cep or Penny Bun (*Boletus edulis*). Theoretically *Leccinum* are edible but they can be tough and apt to give you a bout of digestive upset unless very thoroughly cooked – at least 15 minutes is usually recommended.

So I tend to avoid them.

The commonest in the parish is the Brown Birch Bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*) picture 1. The common name says everything you need to know about this species: it has a brown cap and has a close association with Birch trees, with which it is always found.

The Orange Oak Bolete (*Leccinum aurantiacum*) is quite distinctive with its lovely orange cap (picture 2), though the Orange Birch Bolete (*Leccinum versipelle*) is similar. The tree under which the Scaber-stalks are found is a useful short-cut to identification, though not always totally reliable.

In the parish the Orange Oak Bolete **has** been found with Oak but seems to be more commonly associated with Aspen, as was this fine specimen. Whereas, the Orange Birch Bolete grows under – you guessed it, Birch!



Picture 1: Brown Birch Bolete – showing the dark-scaled stem typical of *Leccinum*Photo by Ian Cross



Picture 2: Orange Oak Bolete – despite its name equally likely to be found under Aspen in the parish. Photo by Ian Cross.

A fair proportion of Scaber-stalks have brown caps and live with Birch trees, so changes in flesh colour assist in identification. The Mottled Bolete (*Leccinum variicolor*) is a dead-ringer for Brown Birch Bolete. However, the flesh of the stem – especially in the base – turns a lovely turquoise when cut or bruised (picture 3). The Brown Birch Bolete barely changes when cut, with perhaps the slightest hint of a pinkish tinge, but never blue.



Picture 3: Mottled Bolete – one of the species that features a strong colour change when the flesh of the stem is cut or bruised. Photo by Ian Cross.

### **Butterfly Observations for 2023**

Roger Hewitt: I first got involved in recording Butterflies in 2005 after the Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation came and gave a talk on conservation and recording butterflies in our parish. I have only seen records going back to 1995 and to be honest I do not think the number of species has changed a great deal since then. Numbers of butterflies fluctuate year on year owing mainly to the weather, and this year was no exception.

- The Silver-studded Blue: another very good year, with 200 counted on Henry Hogger's land. Keep up the cutting, Henry, it has made a difference!
- Grizzled Skippers numbers were right down and I only managed to see one.
   Normally I would see about 6 most years. Or perhaps I missed a good day!
- I didn't see a Dingy Skipper this year, but they are always hard to find and only one or two ever seen at any one time.
- Common Blues are a bit down I used to see more.
- Meadow Browns were okay. Purple Hairstreaks did okay but the Silver Washed- fritillary seemed to be a bit down this year. The Speckled Wood also did okay.
- Small Skipper was good I saw a few more this year, but the Large Skipper seemed down a bit. The Essex Skipper is always hard to spot – this year about the same, in low numbers.
- Green Hairstreak seems to be getting harder to find every year. I don't know why as we have the habitat for it.
- Brown Argus is getting hard to find in the countryside in our parish. I know a
  few people have had some in their garden where conditions are just right,
  but in the wild the vegetation growth overwhelmed them this year.
- Marbled Whites were okay, just a bit down.
- Holly Blue, Peacock, Large White, Small White and Green-veined-White were just about average
- Ringlet had another poor year here as did Small Tortoiseshell which is struggling everywhere.
- Small Copper and Small Heath were okay, as was Wall Brown, but always in small numbers in our parish.
- Grayling had a good year it just seemed to go on and on, as did the Brimstone.
- Just a few Painted Ladies and the odd Clouded Yellow.

- What a brilliant year the Red Admiral had still going in November.
- I have to mention a couple sightings by Ian Cross, who spotted a Large
  Tortoiseshell, which has seen a resurgence the last couple of years, as well
  as a Dark Green Fritillary flying through. I always hope to see one when I
  walk around Rogers Hill Farm as the habitat seems right there.

So overall not a bad year, but with two or three species really struggling.



Grizzled Skipper Photo by Roger Hewitt



Dingy Skipper (not taken this year) Photo by Roger Hewitt

ID Question
Photos submitted by Julian Francis





*Ian Cross*: This is the Ivy Bee (*Colletes hederae*). They are the last solitary bee on the wing in the year and regularly form huge colonies. One or two colonies I regularly monitor consist of something in the order of 2,000 to 3,000 nests!

There was an article on them in newsletter 2020/156 (20th September 2020) which was a special edition entirely devoted to this bee.

### Eli returns to Affpuddle

Adrian Middleton: Members of my family including Eli came for a short stay at my home in Affpuddle this half-term. It was good to see them after a lapse of several months.

Eli, now aged seven, remains enthusiastic about wildlife including the role of zoos in conservation and saving our heathland. His general interests have broadened and now include birds especially birds of prey like the Peregrine

Falcon and eagles. His list already included mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects especially butterflies.

A trip out onto the heath was an important part of our agenda. We had little time available and just the one opportunity. That particular morning was very cold and rather discouraging but fortunately after a while the weather unexpectedly warmed up quite a bit. Checking the garden, we noticed a small number of hoverflies and honeybees on the flowers of an ivy bush and a hornet flying around nearby. But the compost hotel was very quiet. I had seen a Hummingbird Hawkmoth briefly checking out a rose flower a couple of days earlier too.

Then, as Eli, Sam and I set off to our destination it began to rain. But we stuck to our plans and fortunately the weather brightened up again.

We knew the heathland well and sometimes Eli led the way and Sam and I followed on. I was lucky to spot an adult female Common Lizard basking on top of some heather, but it was only in view for a couple of seconds. Almost immediately after this we had a good view of a large adult Long-tailed Field Mouse, but again it was seen for only a few moments.





Field Mouse Photos by Sam Spencer

This was encouraging but it was quite a while before we saw anything else. Then unexpectedly we saw a male Smooth Snake and were able to have a good look at it. More of interest was to follow when we saw another Smooth Snake with a Grass Snake lying close by. This gave us a very good opportunity to study the different colours and markings of these two species even though the Grass Snake didn't stay around very long. The Grass Snake's yellow collar was particularly striking. A third Smooth Snake was found later - all three of this species had been adult males.



Grass Snake and Smooth Snake Photos by Sam Spencer

Other wildlife had seemed quiet, but we saw a solitary Common Snipe fly up from some marshy ground.

By now there was a chill in the air again and given that we were pleased with our findings, we headed back home, where we were greeted by Emma with tea and cakes —thank you Emma and thank you Sam for taking us out and for the photographs. Hopefully we shall be heading out onto our lowland heaths again before too long.





Eli holding a Smooth Snake & close up Photos by Sam Spencer

### **Bird Observations (August onwards)**

Roger Hewitt: it does not seem long ago that birds were still arriving on spring migration! These are my recent observations:

### 3 August

A couple of Willow Warblers and a Reed Warbler were starting their journey south.

### 8 August

A Common Whitethroat was on its way and 3 Mandarin ducks were on the fishing lake at Moor Lane.

### 15 August

The first Whinchat was back in the water meadows at Briantspuddle. I had an evening visit to Turnerspuddle Heath and spotted a Common Redstart feeding up ready for its journey south.

### 16 August

The first Spotted Flycatchers showed up. We get good numbers passing through every year well into October.

### 21 August

A nice flock of Mistle Thrush were noted.

### 23 August

I spotted a juvenile Sedge Warbler in the meadow

### 28 August

14 Yellow Wagtails were at Throop with the cattle.

### 2 September

The water level was quite low by the footbridge in the meadow and enabled a Water Rail to walk up and down showing really well.

### 4 September

Back on Turnerspuddle Heath I saw my first Dartford Warbler sighting for a while and a new male Common Redstart this time.

### 5 September

Back in the water meadows I spotted another Whinchat as well as a family of Reed Warblers.

### 22 September

The Peregrine was back on the pylon near Oakers Wood. Stonechats breed in the parish but we also get a lot passing through on migration and this year they seem to have done well. Meadow Pipits pass through in large numbers and also some overwinter in the parish. A Green Sandpiper was in the river by the main bridge, as the water was still very low. There was also a pair of Marsh Tits 5 October

I walked to Oakers Wood and saw a Firecrest. As I walked back out of the wood on to the heath I looked up and there was a pair of White-tailed Eagles flying around over the heath - a great sight. I am guessing that they were the Poole Harbour pair having a day out.

As I write this I thought I had missed seeing a Northern Wheatear, but as I was sitting in our conservatory looking through the doorway, one landed on the roof opposite. It must have been quite tired because it stayed there until just before dark when it flew off.

I have already seen a few Redwing and one Fieldfare, but lots arriving now on the east coast.



White-tailed Eagle, Oakers Wood Photo by Roger Hewitt



Firecrest, Oakers Bog Photo by Roger Hewitt

### **Erica Trust land and the Wasp Spider**

Lesley Haskins: Up on the heath on Erica Trust land in some lovely sunny autumn weather I spotted this Wasp Spider. It is one of the species that has spread its range northwards into the UK in the last few decades. I remember giving evidence to a Public Inquiry about a road proposed to go over heathland back in the 1980s and its presence on the site was quite a thing to be remarked upon! Now it is pretty widespread, but still I think very special just by being so striking in appearance. Not a great photo I fear, but good enough to see how it gets its name!

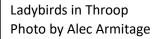


Wasp Spider. Photo by Lesley Haskins

*lan Cross*: The Wasp Spider is one (of many) success stories from Erica Trust land. I have been recording them there for three years now and they are certainly well-established. Breeding is also confirmed, with multiple observations of the spider's peculiar 'diving bell' cocoons.

You are right that in the eighties this wasp spider would have been a bit of a novelty. It has spread quickly in the south of England.

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.



# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/22 26 November 2023



Alec Armitage: just how many varieties of ladybirds are there here?!

*Ian Cross*: These are all Harlequin ladybirds. They congregate to hibernate, sometimes moving into people's homes in hundreds or even thousands. There is safety in numbers and by massing like this they emphasise their warning colours and the chemical defence is reinforced.

Alec's photo shows some of the range of variation in this spectacularly variable species.

There is an excellent colour chart showing some of the spectrum of variation available from the UK Beetle Recording scheme. Unfortunately, when I last checked, their site was undergoing maintenance. Hopefully it will be back online soon. Meanwhile, below is a chart from Wikipedia, giving an idea of the variations.



### Murder and Mayhem by the Rayburn

A horror story by Audrey Grindrod



Photo by Audrey Grindrod

Audrey Grindrod: Last night around 9.15pm I saw a spider on the floor near the Rayburn. He was what I call a 'flat' spider pale colour. Body about 10mm and legs about 20mm (roughly). He started to run towards the dishwasher and the cupboards further on. Then stopped abruptly as a thread was descending from under the cupboard. She, as I shall call her, was more of the styled legs of those daddy long leg type which live in my shower. Her body was about 5mm and legs 10 or 12mm.

He crept towards her and she swung towards him and hit him in the body. Mating perhaps? But if so, a funny mixture of types. He tried to hit her but she stabbed him again in the body and he tried to run away but his legs were stiff.

So she stabbed him again and now he could scarcely move. So this vicious little one waited a while and started to wrap her thread around very fast. He

struggled a bit so she went faster. Amazing to watch this tiny spider enveloping this larger spider! Round and round she went. Then I noticed that one of his legs was still stuck out at his back. She had missed that! She suddenly stopped, must have seen the leg, rushed to it and soon had it wrapped up. By this time it was 9.35pm. She continued to tighten everything until it looked like a battered butterfly wing. Then lifted him off the ground and very slowly with the one thread directed him into the gap between the dishwasher and the cupboard. Rather like a cable car, he swung into the darkness.

In the pictures you can see how tightly his legs are bound together. Is it usual for a small spider to kill a bigger one? She was venomous!

I would love to hear your comments.

*Ian Cross*: Excellent observations of spider behaviour. Audrey has been the spectator of the hunting technique of the Daddy Long-legs Spider (*Pholcus phalangioides*). This is a common spider in our area – I suspect that just about every home in the parish will have them somewhere – and it has featured in the newsletter from time to time.

The Daddy Long-legs Spider is a noted specialist in hunting other spiders but it's not often we get such a vivid account of it in action. It is willing to take on much larger spiders as prey, and I have often seen evidence of them even tackling the giant house spiders of the genus *Tegenaria*.

It's hard to tell from Audrey's photos, but I'm fairly confident that *Tegenaria* is the victim here. I don't know if it's intuition on her part but Audrey's right about the gender of the assailant, which is a 'she'. As for whether her prey is a male, there's not enough detail to see. However, it wouldn't surprise me if he was, as the males are very active in their search for females. It's often male *Tegenaria* that give you a shock as they scamper over the carpet or turn up trapped in the bath.

This wanderlust means that the males are more likely to stray into danger and end up as someone else's evening meal.

Raven with beakful at Oakers Bog

Photo by Helen Frost



Above the fields in Affpuddle

Photo by Helen Frost



Helen Frost: It has been great to see the uplift in birds in the field behind our house this year following the planting of fodder by Roger Prideaux. In previous years, he has done the same but this is the first time it has been so close to us enabling great views of sweeping flypasts of various species. This image shows mostly linnets and we have certainly had a good number of species in our garden this year. Perhaps most surprisingly have been the number of reed buntings!

ID Question
Photo submitted by Julian Francis



*Ian Cross*: This is a parasitic fly called *Ectophasia crassipennis*. Unfortunately, it doesn't yet seem to have a widely accepted common name. It is a relative newcomer to the UK: first recorded in 2019. However, it was very quick to colonise our parish: appearing in the newsletter as early as August 2020!

Julian's fly is a male, as is the one in the picture below. The males have a cluster of sharply-defined black spots on the wings, whereas the females have only a fuzzy dark smudge. They are parasites of true bugs – mainly shieldbugs.



Male *Ectophasia crassipennis* – so new it doesn't even have a common name yet!

Photo by Ian Cross

### Wild Service Tree (Sorbus torminalis)

Helen Frost: We are very lucky to have a Wild Service Tree in our garden. According to the Woodland Trust, "although rare, it is often found in oak and ash woods and pockets of ancient woodland. It grows best in clay and lime-based soils. The flowers provide pollen and nectar for insects, while the

berries are eaten by birds. The leaves are eaten by caterpillars of the moths *Bucculatrix bechsteinella* and *Phyllonorycter mespilella*."

https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/wild-service-tree/

We find that a number of birds enjoy the fruits - not surprisingly Blackbirds, Mistle Thrush and Redwing visit but also Chaffinch, tits and Blackcaps have been seen this year and the tree is now almost bare



Male Blackcap enjoying service tree fruit Photo by Helen Frost



Above: Wild Service Tree Below: Mistle Thrush in the Yew Tree Photos by Helen Frost



### **Peatland Restoration in Moreton Forest**

# Precious Peatland

Work is underway here to rewet and restore precious peatland habitat. By spreading the flow of water across the mires, it will create a wetter landscape where mosses, rare plants and wildlife can thrive.

### What does the work involve?

The work here involves rewetting the habitat by:

- Blocking old ditches originally created to drain the landscape.
- Creating 'leaky dams' made from heather bales and timber that allow water to spread across the mire.
- Cutting back the invasive purple moor grass which has thrived in the drier conditions, smothering more specialist plants like sphagnum mosses, cotton grasses and sundews.

### Why are peatlands important?

- Peat bogs are huge carbon stores and can lock up three times more carbon than woodlands.
- Mosses hold up to 50 times their own weight in water so they can help control flooding and drought, reduce fire risk and improve water quality.
- These wet areas create important habitats for rare plants and animals.

### Working together

The Dorset Peat Partnership, made up of local organisations and landowners, has funding to restore peatlands on 16 sites across the county. To find out more please scan the QR code or visit www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org/peat























Mark Warn: Dorset Peat Partnership are restoring vital peatland habitats in Dorset to preserve peat in our bog and wetland habitats. Healthy peat habitats have a number of benefits: they sequester carbon, store water and support unique biodiversity, all really important factors in our current climate emergency.

Dorset Peat Partnership is a subgroup of Dorset Catchment Partnerships, that includes Dorset Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Forestry England, the Environment Agency, RSPB, National Trust, BCP Council, Dorset Council, BU and the Holme Estate.

The partnership is using the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme's Restoration Grant funding to restore degraded peatland sites where peat has been damaged and degraded due to alterations in the hydrology of the site. But using restoration techniques this peat can be preserved and restored for multiple benefits: capturing carbon, storing water, and supporting unique biodiversity. The partnership has already carried out assessments of important historical environment, engaged with landowners and stakeholders, and collected baseline assessments of wildlife and hydrology.

The work on the ground to rewet and restore precious peatland habitat will start this autumn. It aims, by spreading the flow of water across the mires, to create a wetter landscape where mosses, rare plants and wildlife can thrive. Forestry England is carrying out work on its land that make up 5 of the 16 sites funded by the partnership. These include Cannon Hill Mire, Whitesheet southern mire, Gotham mire (top of Ringwood Forest), Oakers Bog (Affpuddle and Moreton block, Wareham Beat) and Drains West of Greenlands Mire (Purbeck).

### What does the work involve?

The work to rewetting the habitat involves a number of different measures, including:

- Blocking old ditches originally created to drain the landscape.
- Creating 'leaky dams' made from heather bales and timber that allow water to spread across the mire.
- Cutting back the invasive purple moor grass which has thrived in the drier conditions, smothering more specialist plants like sphagnum mosses, cotton grasses and sundews.

### Why does peat matter?

- Peat bogs are huge carbon stores and can lock up three times more carbon than woodlands.
- Mosses hold up to 50 times their own weight in water so they can help control flooding and drought, reduce fire risk and improve water quality.
- These wet areas create important habitats for rare plants and animals.

The sites which will be restored in Moreton Forest are situated just to the north of Oakers Wood, and they include a number of wetland flushes & heathland mires. Over this winter we will be removing plantation trees and scrub, which will then enable some drain blocking and further wetland restoration next season.

For further information please feel free to contact Mark Warn on mark.warn@forestryengland.uk

Please find attached below a few photos of the sites at Oakers. This includes my colleague, Sarah Oakley, FE Ecologist, marking crop trees to be removed as part of this winter's work.

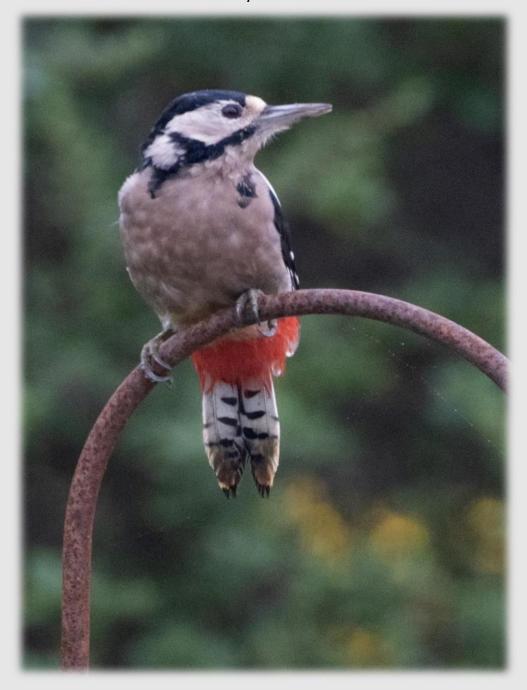






### Female Great Spotted Woodpecker in garden

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.

### Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2023/23 27 December 2023



The Small wood along Bat Willow lane looking more like a Mangrove swamp.

Photo by Roger Hewitt

### **Kingfisher on Erica Trust land**

*lan Cross*: A welcome sight on the 9<sup>th</sup> December was a Kingfisher, perched on one of the fallen logs overhanging the largest pool by the road at the lowest point of Smokeham Bottom. No reason why they shouldn't visit - it must seem like a very promising body of water. They are very adaptable birds in the valley - they frequently pay visits to our garden pond.



Bat Willow Lane in flood Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: There are a lot of Waxwings in the country just now and they are moving ever closer to Dorset. They love winter berries so if you have some in your garden please keep an eye out for these fantastic birds.

### **Recent Bird Observations by Roger Hewitt**

Roger Hewitt: With all the wet and windy weather over the last few months birds have been hard to find in any quantity.

### 25 October

While walking on Gully Lane I spotted ten Yellowhammers and one hundred or so Linnets feeding in a field that had just been reseeded. It just goes to show we do get birds if food is available, but sadly Briantspuddle and Turnerspuddle lack any other food source for seed eating birds at this time of year and they move on quickly.

#### 27 October

To my surprise a Woodlark was singing and in full song for at least ten minutes on Erica Trust Land until it flew to the other side of the heath. Also around fifteen Crossbills were present but were very mobile. There were a few Mistle Thrush around and several Tit flocks about. There were also a few Chiffchaffs Goldcrest, Treecreepers and Nuthatches as well as improving numbers of Redwings and Fieldfares.

#### 14 November

A Tit flock moved through our garden and with it was a Marsh Tit which stayed for a couple of hours. A few days later I called on Audrey Grindrod and one was on her feeders. It was nice to see a few more of these birds.

### 22 November

Jonathan Forty helped me clean out our Barn Owl boxes. All went well - no nasty surprises other than a few unhatched Stock Dove eggs.

### 27 November

The meadows were well flooded with 11 Mute Swans present - 4 adults and 7 juveniles. 6 Mandarin Ducks were flying up and down the river, finally settling on the fishing lake. The lake also had 3 Shovelers, 2 Gadwell and a few Teal. The numbers of Little Grebe was up to 7. I also saw a pair of Egyptian Geese and a Green Sandpiper. I had expected more Gulls, but saw Herring Gulls, Black Headed Gulls and a couple of Common Gulls.

### 11 December

After all the wet a nice sunny and warm day I took another walk around the meadows. Bird wise it was quiet, but a Cetti's Warbler started singing by the main foot bridge at Throop. I then went up to Erica Trust Land to try my luck. It was quiet here for birds but to my surprise 2 Peacock butterflies were sunbathing on some sheltered logs. I wonder if we will be seeing butterflies on Christmas Day.

### 16 December

A long walk around the Parish but the best was a flock of around 50 Lesser Redpoll in Oakers Wood along the bridleway path also Firecrest and Marsh Tit.

### **Watching the Yew Tree**

Helen Frost: Here's a squirrel - I didn't know they ate yew which, of course, is poisonous to other mammals. I also saw Goldcrest, Blackbird, Blackcap, Coal Tit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch - all eating berries!



Squirrel at Yew Tree Photo by Helen Frost

*Ian Cross*: A little-known fact: the aril - the fleshy-red outside of the fruit – is edible, it is only the seed inside that is toxic. It would be interesting to know if the squirrel ate the whole fruit, or just the outside.



Redwing at Yew Tree Photo by Helen Frost



Mistle Thrush at Yew Tree Photo by Helen Frost

### A Winter Phenomenon: Cluster Flies in Lofts

*Ian Cross:* Cluster flies don't nest in lofts in the sense of breeding there (they are actually parasites of earthworms). They enter roof spaces to pass the winter. Most older properties in rural areas get a few - we usually see some every year.

However, if they find conditions to their liking they leave a trace of pheromones as markers. This attracts subsequent generations of flies to use the same site. The hibernating flies themselves will leave in the spring and won't live to the next winter - it's their offspring who will return. This can mean that numbers build up year after year, which sometimes leads to enormous infestations.

Cluster Fly (*Pollenia rudis*) Photo by Ian Cross





Song Thrush at Yew Tree Photo by Helen Frost



Fieldfares in garden Photo by Helen Frost



Female Crossbill near Culpepper's Dish Photo by Helen Frost



Peacock Butterfly on 11 December Photo by Roger Hewitt



Marsh Tit on feeder Photo by Roger Hewitt

### One to look out for:

*Ian Cross*: Lawson Cypress is one of the most widely grown ornamental conifers in the parish. If they grow near you, it's worth checking them on any still, sunny day throughout the winter. Lawson Cypress plays host to the lovely Juniper Shieldbug (*Cyphostethus tristriatus*). The adults hibernate and will sometimes appear, to bask in the sun, all through the winter.



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.