



Dramatic skies in Briantspuddle Photo by Mel Parks

NB – both photos above were taken more or less at the same time, one while facing north and the other facing south.

Feedback

Brian and Jan Amber: thanks for the final news for 2023 and this to say thanks to you both and to all the contributors and all the best for 2024.

Margaret and Ian: This was one of many good wishes that we received. Thank you for all your comments and feedback. Glad you are enjoying the newsletter.

In the Depths of Winter

Icicles form where vehicles splash through a puddle on the edge of the parish

Photo by Ian Cross



Firsts and Lasts

Ian Cross: Here we are in the very depths of winter, with temperatures hovering above zero and a bitter north-easterly wind blowing. Generally, it's a time for taking stock and writing-up your observations from the previous year.

You would think that, in the insect world at least, it would be the last time of year you would expect to see any activity. Yet, not everything is totally locked-away, out of sight and deep in hibernation.

For a start, there are always those tantalising latecomers or early risers that can add a frisson of the unexpected to a winter's walk.

For example, my last butterfly of 2023 was on New Year's Eve – yes, the 31st December, the very last day of the year. It was a single Peacock butterfly on

our patio. Very torpid, it was huddled on the paving, probably an individual that had ventured out from hibernation and was deeply regretting it.

I had hoped for a matching observation on New Year's Day, but it was not to be, as rain had set in by the afternoon. However, I was rewarded by the finding of, not one, but two different species of Shieldbug basking on the 3rd of January.

There is one insect that I particularly look out for at this time of year. It's a bit of a rarity, officially a Nationally Scarce species and we are fortunate to have good populations of it across the parish. They have been recorded from Moreton Forest to Black Hill, with the nearest to the villages being on Erica Trust Heath.



Hairy Sand Wasp: Female in a typical basking position with legs splayed and body pressed to the soil. Photo by Ian Cross.

This is the Hairy Sand Wasp (*Podalonia hirsuta*). The females are unusual among our hunting wasps in hibernating as adults through the winter. Like many hibernators they sometimes emerge in the latter stages of the winter if

there's a particularly still, sunny day. I saw one at Oakers Bog on the 6th January this year – beating my previous earliest record by two weeks.

Although they will take to the wing, even at this time of year, they generally prefer just to bask in the sun. They press themselves tightly to the ground, trying to absorb every last morsel of heat, often adopting a characteristic starshaped pose (see photo).

If a cloud drifts across the sun they hastily retreat into their hibernation burrows, perhaps not to be seen again until the spring arrives.

Moreton Forest

lan Cross: Despite its name, Moreton Forest (still marked as Moreton Plantation on Ordnance Survey maps) lies within the Affpuddle/Turners Puddle parish. I thought I knew the area well but one or two interesting features have emerged – literally from the undergrowth – as a result of recent clearance of invasive Rhododendron.

When the cloak of enveloping vegetation was removed, a new feature, who's existence I had never suspected, emerged on the slopes near Clouds Hill. Now visible for the first time in 50 years or so, this was a neat little pine-clad knoll sitting in a prominent position on the ridge and enjoying good views to the south. See picture below.

Interesting in itself, but it wasn't until my third or fourth visit that I bothered to look up and discovered something else about this 'new' landmark.

Now, the backbone of the conifer planting that gives Moreton Forest its name consists of Corsican Pine and Scot's Pine. Other conifers appear in odd patches but these two species form by far and away the bulk of the trees that dominate the skyline.

Closer inspection of the trees on the new knoll revealed them to be a neat cluster of 10 Maritime Pines (*Pinus pinaster*), in total contrast to the Scot's Pines all around. To the best of my knowledge there are no more of this species in the immediate neighbourhood.



Who planted this group of Maritime Pines on this prominent spot? Photo by Ian Cross.

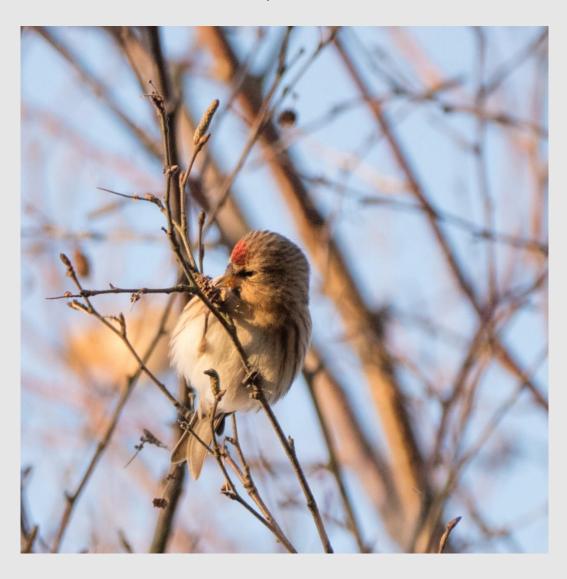
It's obvious that this group was designed as a landscape feature, to highlight this little knoll on the skyline. When initially planted they would have stood out in glorious isolation. But who put them here and why?

From their size I estimate that they may have been planted around the time, or not long after, Lawrence of Arabia was in residence at Clouds Hill cottage only a couple of hundred metres away.

Is there a link and is there any significance in the location and the number of trees planted? If anyone can shed any light on the origins and purpose of this feature I would love to know.

Redpoll at Oakers Wood

Photo by Helen Frost



Affpuddle Water Meadows

Adrian Middleton: I realise Canada Geese are not really noteworthy, but I send one showing about 100 on the Affpuddle Water Meadows, a regular feature in recent weeks. Perhaps more interesting was the "one off" sighting of 9 of 25 Greylag Geese - not rare, but only spotted here very occasionally.



Affpuddle Water Meadows with Greylag Geese in the photo below.

Photos by Adrian Middleton.



Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
Please send your contributions to macheetham@hotmail.co.uk.
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Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2024/02 26 February 2024



Orange Ladybird Photo by Derek Ralls

Derek Ralls:

Found in the kitchen – still alive and kicking.

Now in the bug hotel.

"Full board of course".

Right: the bug hotel Photo by Derek Ralls



Orange Ladybirds: Quick Facts

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Quick facts

Common name: orange ladybird

Scientific name: Halyzia sedecimguttata

Family: Coccinellidae

Habitat: woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens

Predators: birds

Origin: native

What do orange ladybirds look like?

Adults: the orange ladybird is bright orange with light brown antennae and 14-16 creamy white spots on its wingcase. The edges of their wingcases are slightly transparent. They grow up to 5mm.

Larvae: are small and yellow-white. They have light yellow vertical stripes and black spots along their bodies.

Not to be confused with: other species of ladybird. The biggest differences are in colour and the number of spots, so look out for orange!

The orange ladybird used to be much rarer, and associated with ancient woodland. Now, numbers are increasing and the species has adapted to feed on sycamore.

Lapwings at West Farm

Photo by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: Good to see so many Lapwings around us at the moment - a long way away but that is what they are!!



The Australian invader that's eating our earthworms

Ian Cross: This is the latest in what seems like an endless series of introduced, non-native creatures. Additions to our fauna which have huge potential to disrupt our wildlife, in ways that we don't yet fully understand and may only become apparent in the fullness of time.

The Australian Flatworm (*Australoplana sanguinea*) first appeared in the British Isles on the Isles of Scilly in 1980. It has since colonised much of Britain and Ireland. And now that includes our parish, as I can report here.

It's a native of Australia and probably arrived here courtesy of the horticultural trade – testament to the towering stupidity of moving plant material and soil across continents.

Flatworms are in a totally different group, and not at all related, to other worms. They are not made of segments – the little rings, visible on an earthworm – and have a very different body plan. As the name suggests, they tend to be flattened in cross-section. But the body shape is hard to describe, as they are in continuous motion: writhing, flexing, probing, and expanding and contracting according to their surroundings.

This species is generally pink to a vivid pinkish-orange, depending on when it last fed (picture 1). Though there are a series of minute eyes at the head end, these are very difficult to make out and the body seems featureless when first seen. Only a slightly more pointed and tapered leading tip, constantly expanding and probing, gives away which is the head end (picture 2). When fully extended, the Australian Flatworm can reach up to eight centimetres.

They are predators of earthworms and obviously find our native species an acceptable snack. As so often happens with introduced species, this Australian interloper has arrived without any of the natural enemies which act as a system of checks and balances in its natural home.

As yet there are no approved chemical or biological control methods, so what their effect might be on our native soil organisms, and the all-important soil structure they create, remains to be seen.



Picture 1 above: The Australian Flatworm comes in vivid shades of orange to pink. Picture 2 below: Continuously exploring and probing: this is the head end. Photos by Ian Cross.



Barn Owl Update

Helen Frost: The Barn Owl is now seen most days, from the house or whilst I'm walking up the road towards West Farm. Yesterday (10 Feb) I saw a raven flying with a twig and heard Woodlarks at Oakers so Spring is on its way!!



Barn Owl in Affpuddle. Photo by Helen Frost.

Roger's Bird Update

Roger Hewitt: Well, a soggy start to the New Year and with the water levels just a bit too high in Briantspuddle and Throop, so not good for attracting any waders. But walking around I did manage to see 42 species of birds in the first few days.

On 3 January I walked towards Oakers Wood and to my surprise lots of Snipe flew up off the bog but settled back down at the southern end. There were too many to count exactly but I estimate around 100.

On 5 January I had a wander around Affpuddle and saw and a lot geese in the meadow as well as 4 Common Gulls and Herring and Black-headed Gulls. I then

walked up over the farmland. There were a few Yellowhammers, Linnets Skylark, Jays, Mistle Thrush and Redwings.

On 8 January I took a walk to Moreton Plantation and saw my first big flock of Fieldfare by Spyway (derelict cottage). A bit further on I had a good view of a Green Woodpecker. There is talk in the birding world that this species has dropped in numbers.

I then went back up Moreton Drive and saw a few Reed Bunting and Stonechats.

On 9 January I saw my first Kestrel and 4 Lapwings in Troop meadow.

On 12 January I saw a pair of Gadwell Ducks on the fishing lake at Moor Lane.

On 15 January I saw a pair of Mandarin.

16 January was a nice sunny day so I made good use of our free tickets to visit the Sculpture Park at Pallington. It was nice to see a lot of birds. The best was the Goosander - a rare visitor to our parish. I also saw 2 Kingfishers, a pair of Egyptian Geese, Tufted Ducks and a Grey Wagtail.

On 19 January I finally caught up with a pair of Crossbills. They might be nesting now.



Goosander at the Sculpture Park, Pallington Lakes. Photo by Roger Hewitt.

On 21 January I walked down to Brockhill cress beds and spotted a Green Sandpiper, along with Pied Wagtails and Meadow Pipits, plus a Cetti's Warbler trying to sing.

Over the next few days I found small flocks of Siskins and Lesser Redpoll, Bullfinch, Marsh Tit and Tawny Owl.

I'm glad to see the Barn Owl has come through the wet winter. It's lucky that we have some higher ground either side of the water meadows to help its winter hunting. While I was watching the Barn Owl a Merlin flew across and landed in the trees by Pheasant Cottage (Briantspuddle). I've seen it two nights running.

So my list for January ends on 73 species, which is about average, but a few other people have spotted a few more birds. Taisie Russell saw a Great White Egret and the following day a Marsh Harrier flew through the meadow at the back of her bungalow. The Marsh Harrier is a first for our Parish list. Also a friend of mine spotted the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Oakers Wood and someone else spotted a Spoonbill and a Barnacle goose in the meadow at the Sculpture park at Pallington Lakes.

So keep looking! Who knows what will turn up next? Waxwings would be nice - they have been seen at Upton.



This Blackcap was in my garden for a week in January. Photo by Roger Hewitt

Rosemary Beetle

Ian Cross: This gorgeous little rainbow of a beetle just goes to show that not all introductions are necessarily a disaster.



Picture 1. Unmistakeable: the rainbow-coloured Rosemary Beetle. Photo by Ian Cross.

Despite its scientific name, the Rosemary Beetle (*Chrysolina americana*) is actually a native of Southern Europe and North Africa. It first appeared in the UK in 1963 and rapidly established itself: first in the warmer, drier south-east and then more generally across England, Wales and Scotland.

I suspect that it probably occurs in just about every parish garden that has a sunny corner where members of the mint family are grown: it has certainly become a regular in our garden. It feeds widely on Lavender, Thyme and, yes of course, Rosemary.

Though both the adults and larvae nibble the foliage, it somehow has managed to avoid becoming a pest.

The rainbow colour scheme makes the Rosemary Beetle virtually unmistakeable among our beetles. There is another lookalike, *Chrysolina cerealis*, but that is a rarity confined to North Wales.

The adults are quite diminutive, at about 7 to 8mm – roughly the size of the common Seven-spot Ladybird. They can be found all through the year and will often become active towards the end of winter. This one was found in our garden in mid-February: a welcome splash of colour at this time of year.



Picture 2. Face to face with a Rosemary Beetle. Photo by Ian Cross.

At the bird feeder

Helen Frost: As a child I don't remember anything but the tit family feeding from a hanging feeder but we get all sorts here now - woodpecker, magpie, starling, robin will all have a go, and here's a blackbird trying his luck!



Blackbird at Affpuddle feeder. 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 2024/03 26 March 2024



Cattle Egret at West Farm, Affpuddle. Photo by Helen Frost

Early Grey

Ian Cross: The Early Grey (*Xylocampa areola*) is a moth that does "exactly what it says on the tin" – it's early and, yes, it is essentially grey. This is one of the first moths to emerge in the first days of spring and is always a welcome herald of the new season.

Despite being merely various shades of greyish-brown, it is still an attractive moth. The mottled pattern mimics bark or lichen. The camouflage is enhanced by the little, triangular tuft of scales just behind the head. When the moth sits in its normal, vertical, resting position, this 'Mohican' feature looks just like a little protuberance on the bark of a tree, such as you get where a small twig has broken-off.



An Early Grey as it is seen in its natural resting position – sitting vertically and beautifully camouflaged on weathered wood. Photo by Ian Cross.

This must be quite a successful trick, as you find these tufts widely among unrelated moth species, wherever concealment on a tree trunk is called for. It's interesting to compare a moth in its natural, resting position with the photos you see on moth group web pages. Those are usually of a captive moth, freshly picked-out from a trap, and placed on some random background. The effect is totally wrong, and the camouflage completely disrupted.

The Early Grey is a widespread and common moth in the parish. To be honest, the easiest way to encounter it is by using a moth trap. However, I always find it a lot more satisfying to use a bit of field craft to 'crack the code' and discover one at rest on a fence post or tree trunk by day.

This moth was found in the first week of March, towards the southernmost extremity of the parish on Bovington Heath. It was perched almost at ground level on a post. Despite being on the south face of its chosen resting place, and sitting motionless in the full spring sunshine, it made no attempt to tuck itself away. It was, after all, perfectly safe and absolutely confident in the strength of its camouflage.

Egyptian GeeseIn Affpuddle Water Meadows Photo by Helen Frost



Firsts for the Year

Ian Cross: I found both frog and toad spawn on Black Hill on the 30th January. These aren't particularly exceptional dates: the earliest I've recorded in the parish being on the 23rd January for frogs and the 27th January for toads. However, I've never known both to spawn before the end of January in the same year.

Palmate Newts were equally quick off the mark, with full courtship display being seen on the 24th January.

Reptiles are usually later to make their presence felt. Nonetheless, I encountered my first active Grass Snake on the 9th February. A Common Lizard was seen basking on the 23rd February, which made the first Slow-worm, on the 27th February, look positively tardy, like it was having a lie-in!

I used to record the first songs of our ten commonest migrant warblers, as well as our two resident species, every year. I don't do this religiously any more, as we're often out of the country in the early spring. Despite this, there's already been a few songsters.

Cetti's Warblers were singing at the very beginning of the year – but, then they never really stop, do they. Next came Dartford Warbler, with the first full song on the 17th January. Chiffchaffs joined in with song on the 10th February.

More unusual was the first Blackcap, singing lustily on the 24th February – an incredible three weeks before my previous parish record!

We live in remarkable times.

Roger Hewitt's bird updates

Roger Hewitt: I started with another visit to West Farm, Affpuddle, and spotted a Cattle Egret with the Little Egrets in with the cows. There was also a large finch flock of around 200 birds feeding with the cows, which was nice to see. I

also saw Cattle Egrets near our parish boundary at Southover. February is a quiet month bird-wise most birds being settled, but I kept walking. There have been lots of Siskins on the feeders in my garden on the wet days. I also saw a couple of Woodlark on Erica Trust Land plus a few Crossbills and a small flock of Lesser Redpolls.

On 20 February I had another visit to the Sculpture Park at Pallington. There were at least 3 Cetti's Warblers singing, and the Great Crested Grebe has returned for another year. On 27 February I saw a pair of Goshawks up displaying and at least 20 Buzzards.

Into the start of March now, and on a walk to Oakers Wood I found my first Firecrest for the year - a female. More Stonechats are starting to show now and in the next week or so the first summer migrants will start to arrive.

Working parties have been ongoing on Turnerspuddle Heath throughout the winter. A lot of areas have been cleared, especially around the fence lines ready for the return of the cattle. We have now stopped as the Dartford Warblers, Stonechats and Woodlarks have returned to the site to set up their breeding territories. We will start again in September and we are always looking for extra helpers!

The Siskin isn't happy to share the food with the Lesser Redpoll!

Photo by Roger Hewitt.



Heathland Rarity

Ian Cross: There are roughly 300 species of Ground Beetles in Dorset. The tendency is for them to be nocturnal and, like the model T Ford, come in "any colour as long as it's black". However, there are some that are not only active by day but are real dazzlers.

This one, the Heath Goldsmith, *Carabus nitens*, occurs in our parish and is a personal favourite of mine. It's a bit of a heathland rarity and not often encountered but, when you do come across one, you never forget it.

Carabus nitens – once seen, never forgotten 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 2024/04 1 May 2024



Pheasant in Briantspuddle Photo by Derek Ralls

Derek Ralls: I found this rather colourful chap on the conservatory step, tapping on the window.

Cuckoo Updates

10 April 2024

Anne Colquhoun: Hurray! Heard a cuckoo loud and clear today.

21 April 2024

Jamie McMillan: Wow...Cuckoo! Heard from my bedroom in Briantspuddle. I think it might be my earliest in the village. I wonder if Erica Trust heathland restoration might be bringing them closer? Ian - please don't tell me you were trying to 'call them in'!

Ian Cross: What a wonderful background sound to hear from the house! No, not me this time - I'm in Portugal at the moment.

Oakers Bog has been the most reliable site in the parish recently. Last year they were heard there on the 8th April. My earliest in the parish, also from Oakers Bog, was on the 7th April in 2020.

When we first moved to Briantspuddle it was possible to hear two males answering each other across the water meadows - clearly audible from the house. Alas, those days seem to be over and I haven't heard a duet since 2006.



Erica Trust Land

Tree Pipit on Erica Trust land Photo by Roger Hewitt

Roger Hewitt: A lot of people ask me why have some of the trees been cut off about 10 foot high across the Erica Trust Land. As far as I know, it's to help the birds. The ground nesting birds like the Tree Pipit in the photo need to perch up to sing and guard their nest site. Without a bit of help they probably would not nest here.

The same goes for some of the brash that's left on the ground - it provides some protection for the nest. Also, small birds do not like to fly over big open spaces if they can help it. Hope this answers some questions.

Ian Cross: I'm always in two minds about the provision of tall stumps on heathland. On the one hand they provide essential song posts for things like Tree Pipits. On the other hand, though, there is a school of opinion that they provide observation posts for predators like corvids. These use them to sit on and scan the surroundings for the eggs and nestlings of ground-nesting birds.



Robin on Erica Trust land Photo by Helen Frost

ID Question

Jamie McMillan: This turned up on the outside of my moth trap this morning (26 April). I haven't seen one here before, but I'm not hunting for spiders particularly. Do you know anything about narrowing down the species? If so I'll freeze it for you.

Ian Cross: It looks like a female of the very widespread and common *Xysticus cristatus*. However, *Xysticus* is a difficult and morphologically similar genus with about a dozen UK species, so I couldn't say categorically. Identification would probably require microscopic examination of the epigyne. If so, it would be better to preserve it in alcohol rather than freezing.



Xysticus Photo by Jamie McMillan



Xysticus Photo by Jamie McMillan

Stoat in the garden

Helen Frost: Great to see this little stoat this morning - not great photo but it was through the kitchen window on a gloomy morning!



Bird Updates by Roger Hewitt

18 March

A walk around Rogers Hill Farm. Not the best of weather, but I saw 12 Yellowhammers. I also saw a few Skylarks, 2 Kestrels and 2 Sparrowhawks, plus the usual common birds.

21 March

I walked towards Oakers Wood. A Peregrine was on the pylon. I then saw more Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Stonechats and a nice male Dartford Warbler.

From there I walked on to Turnerspuddle Heath and was greeted by a Tawny Owl calling at 10am. I also observed a pair of Woodlarks, some Stonechats and a Dartford Warbler.

In the afternoon I walked around the water meadows of Briantspuddle and Throop and saw my first Sand Martins – about 30 of them feeding up quite high. I also saw my first 2 Swallows, 3 Reed Buntings, 2 Egyptian Geese and 7 Greylag Geese. I counted 4 Cetti's Warblers singing.

5 April

On Erica Trust land, I saw 2 male Tree Pipits singing. By 10 April they were joined by some females, so they aren't hanging about, are they?!

I then had another walk around the water meadows and saw Swallows, Sand Martins and, this time, 4 House Martins.

8 April

I walked on Turnerspuddle Heath and found my first Willow Warbler. I have found them hard to find up to now, and there have not been that many flying through Portland. There should be a lot more to come. My next find was a beauty - a male Common Redstart. I was really pleased to see one in the spring as most of my sightings in our parish are in the autumn.

10 April

Not too windy, but more rain! While walking back from Oakers Wood, to my surprise a Cuckoo started singing on Briantspuddle Heath. I was surprised because it was raining really hard. Perhaps he needed a bath after his long migration? (Last year I heard my first Cuckoo on 8 April).

Updates and Recollections from April 2024

Adrian Middleton: Looking out of the window I have been able to observe some of the birds visiting the Affpuddle water meadows over the several months of almost continuous flooding there this winter and early spring.



Sightings include over 100 Canada Geese, about 20 Greylags plus at least 3 Egyptian Geese and some 20 Little Egrets (more than I have seen there for several years) joined by 2 or 3 Cattle Egrets (firsts for me at this location). I also saw 5 Mute Swans.

Others include Cormorant, Mallard, Grey Heron and Moorhen plus, no doubt, some that I have missed. For me the most interesting were the regular flights by the Egrets to and from the water to the bird seed crops on the West Farm field to the south of village where flocks of small passerines have also been in evidence. With cattle grazing there latterly a little care was needed to differentiate Little Egrets and Cattle Egrets, aided by Helen Frost's recent newsletter photo of a Cattle Egret.

Whilst bird numbers in the garden itself have been relatively quiet, I have been entertained by a small number of Brown Rats which appeared in the back garden for a few days and then just as suddenly disappeared. They appeared to be in very good condition and got along together very well. There were one

or two quarrels with the Wood Pigeons, with a bit of leaping about but the cock Pheasant, a regular visitor was treated with more respect.

Rat amongst the pigeons
Photos by Adrian Middleton





With the arrival of spring and finding a large Common Toad in the Compost Hotel, my thoughts turned also to our reptiles and my regular companions. So I ventured onto the local heath, where the going gets rough. Quite soon I was pleasantly surprised to find two young adders, a grass snake and then elsewhere lots of slow worms, some coiled up together. At least I had

something to talk about, hopefully leading to a joint venture in the near future.



Slow Worms Photo by Adrian Middleton



Adder Photo by Adrian Middleton

Goldcrest in the garden yew

Photo by Helen Frost



On their way! Swift Update by Angie Talbot

Tuesday 16 April

10,591 Swifts coming through on the south (Mediterranean) coast of France near to the border with Spain.

Wednesday 17 April 28,887 Swifts

Wish I could see them!

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
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Rosy garlic

Jane Courtier: From a distance I thought this little clump of pretty lilac-coloured flowers near Culpepers Dish was lady's smock, but on closer inspection it turned out to be rosy garlic (Allium roseum). A native of Mediterranean areas, this plant has become established in some southern counties of the UK, usually as a garden escape. I'm not sure I've seen it growing locally before.



Rosy Garlic Photo by Jane Courtier

The little red bulbils that can be seen below the flowers very quickly start developing into new plants, and are similar to the "walking onions" I grow in the veg garden. With these, once the flower heads become too heavy for the stems to support them they topple to ground level and the babies can then get their emerging roots into the soil to start an independent life. Over the years a whole series of clumps of new plants develop, each a falling flower stem's distance away from the parents - so they seem to be "walking" all across the veg plot. I imagine the rosy garlic behaves in just the same way, so maybe this little patch of plants in the parish will eventually become widespread.

(By the way, I know the local landmark is nearly always spelled "Culpepper's Dish", but pedant that I am, I always spell "Culpeper" with the single p - it's named after Nicholas Culpeper, after all).



Rosy Garlic Photo by Jane Courtier

Brassica ShieldbugPhotos by Julian Francis





Julian Francis: Five on the track south from Southover Lodge (about 300m down), which may be in the parish. The first ones I've seen. On Garlic Mustard. Two colour forms.

Eli's visits the parish again

Adrian Middleton: Members of my family including Eli visited my home towards the end of May. Eli remains very keen on natural history, wildlife conservation and the roles that zoos can play. This time we also had an interesting discussion on Darwin's theory of evolution.



Poor weather was forecast for the following few days so within a couple of hours of their arrival, Sam, Eli and I set off for some local heathland, taking advantage of the fine sunny conditions but with a cold northerly wind. We soon found ourselves crossing some wet heath where there were lots of pink-flowered lousewort and abundant patches of sundew with sticky round leaves, used to trap small insects - a source of nutrients on otherwise poor soils.

Moving quickly along sodden paths, we soon reached some dry heath where we spotted a small patch of heather with white flowers which hopefully would bring us good luck.



Oblong-leaved Sundews Photo by Adrian Middleton

Almost straight away to our surprise, we saw an adult male Sand Lizard basking in some short vegetation. It was in good breeding condition, showing its bright green flanks. Unfortunately it soon made off into deeper cover. Then again, moments later we were also lucky to spot a large adult female Sand Lizard, lacking the green of the male, but showing ocelli, those white spots within dark edging, along its body, a feature of this species of lizard.

Before too long we were to see a very dark brown Smooth Snake, with opaque eyes, both the outcome when skin sloughing is about to take place. It was an adult female. Rather surprisingly, after covering a fair amount of ground, we were to see a further seven Smooth Snakes taking advantage of the sunshine.





Left: Eli with Smooth Snake. Right: Smooth Snake. Photos by Sam Spencer.

One of these moved off too quickly to be seen well and one was an adult male. However the remaining five were adult females, again very dark coloured. It was rather unusual to see such a large proportion of females of this colour and with opaque eyes; all were also pale grey underneath again a pre-slough feature without which the majority of females would normally be black. Basking is known to be advantageous during the processes leading to skin sloughing and in one or two, this would also appear to be helping with incubation of eggs developing during pregnancy.

We had been walking on the heath searching for reptiles for quite a while and time had passed quickly. As we were leaving the heath we saw more flowers including a few southern marsh orchids and some large foxgloves high up on a nearby bank. Finally arriving back home we found a few woodlice in the compost hotel before we headed for the pond. Initially this also looked quiet.

Whilst thinning out the extensive amount of blanket weed, we had a pleasant surprise when we found several adult Palmate Newts. Each of the males had black webs on its hind feet and slender filaments at the end of the tail, features lacking in the females. All were showing the limited amount of orange yellow

colouring with spots on their undersides, expected in Palmate Newts but something which is more extensive in Smooth Newts. It was Eli who also spotted more than a dozen very small recently hatched baby newts (efts), each one cm long, looking rather like miniature adults but with gills. There were a couple of large Southern Hawker Dragonfly larvae about too, looking rather fearsome. After inspection, all were returned carefully to where we had found them.

It had been an interesting day and we were pleased to find a nice cuppa and biscuits awaiting us when we went inside – thank you Emma.



Foxgloves Photo by Adrian Middleton

A birdsong app

Henry Hogger: As part of my attempt to do the Wildlife Trust's "30 Days Wild" challenge for June, I've downloaded an app for identifying birdsong called Merlin. The first day I used it in the garden, it claimed to identify (among other more familiar names) a "Eurasian Blackcap" and a Long-tailed Tit.

As my bird knowledge is virtually zero, I wondered if these are relatively common around here, or whether I've been listening to something a bit rarer?

Of course there's a third possibility, namely that the app is inaccurate (I think it's American, though I selected the "UK and Europe" option).

Ian Cross: Both those are common in the neighbourhood. The Blackcap, especially, has been singing strongly in recent weeks.



Left: Spotted Flycatcher at Throop. Right: Cetti's warbler at Throop. Taken on 8 May 2024. Photos by Helen Frost.



Left: Affpuddle Blue Tit with beakful. Right: Affpuddle Starling with beakful
Photos by Helen Frost

May Updates By Roger Hewitt

10 May

A Raptor watch produced 6 Red Kites, 1 Goshawk, 4 Hobbies and 8 Common Buzzards. I also saw a couple of Butterflies, with 1 Holly Blue and 2 Large Whites.

20 May

During a walk around Rogers Hill Farm, I found 7 pairs of Common Whitethroat and 7 pairs of Skylark. I was disappointed with just 4 pairs of Yellowhammer, but I did not check every hedgerow, so perhaps I missed a few. There are a lot of Blackbirds, 4 pairs of Blackcaps, a few Chiffchaffs and 1 pair of Kestrels. A few Butterflies were also about, including Wall Brown, Red Admiral, Orange Tip, Small White, Speckled Wood and Peacock, but in very low numbers. In the afternoon a walk to Moreton Plantation, to our Grizzled Skipper site and I did find just one. I also saw 2 very fresh Brown Argus and just 1 Common Blue.

27 May

I got up early and walked up to the main river bridge and the wooded area below Moor Lane at 6.30am the dawn chorus was still going. I have not done this for a while and it just sounded great. This will be ending soon as I saw lots of young birds flitting about. I also found two separate Spotted Flycatchers, one at Moor Lane end and one up the river at the bottom of School Lane, although still on the river's edge. Let's hope that they stay.

They are always the last of our migrant birds to arrive here and numbers seem to be down this year so let's hope for a late influx as sometimes happens.

Hazel Coppicing in Lee Woods

Lesley Haskins: The Erica Trust has just completed a third hazel coup at the far western end of Lee Woods - adjacent to the Affpuddle Road. This cutting of the hazel stools lets in the much needed light to maintain the woodland flora, particularly the primroses and bluebells, and the woodland insects. So long as the deer are excluded for long enough, the cut hazel survives and regrows - eventually to be recut on a cyclical basis.



Hazel Coppicing in Lee Woods. Photo by Lesley Haskins.

The picture, taken from the Affpuddle Road, shows three separate ages of hazel cutting. In the right background can be seen the first coup we cut several years ago, now sprouting strong vigorous hazel. In the foreground can be seen the latest cut, where the hazel will soon be shooting up again from the cut stools and the bluebells are stunning. In the left background is hazel that has yet to be cut - perhaps in 3 of 4 years' time. Odd areas of hazel are left just to do their own thing. Note the all-important deer excluding fence in the foreground. To protect against Sika deer the fence has to be 1.8 m high!

Also in the picture can be seen the very mature copper beech and a couple of its progeny. We also have a number of walnuts in this area which were planted by the Estate. Unlike the exotic Rum cherries they are not invasive and so are being left to grow on. Unfortunately we are having to fell our roadside ash because of the hazard presented by ash dieback. But on the upside we are delighted to see how the limes along The Hollow have responded so well to pollarding.

Foxgloves

Roger Hewitt: Everywhere on our heathland that has been cleared in the last couple of years there has been an explosion of Foxgloves this year looks magnificent, wonder what other flowers are hiding underneath.



Foxgloves Photo by Roger Hewitt

Silver-studded Blue on Erica Trust Land

Ian Cross: I found the first, pioneer, dispersive female of Silver-studded Blue in Smokeham Bottom on the 17th July last year. I don't know if you had any further records from other entomologists, but I didn't see any others after that.

However, I've just (22nd June) found a freshly-emerged male on Erica Trust Heath. From his absolutely mint condition but feeble flight, I am confident he was at the emergence site and wasn't a dispersive individual. So I think that

this is conclusive proof that Silver-studded Blue is confirmed as breeding on the reserve.

Interestingly, it was on the permissive path at the other end of the site from Smokeham Bottom, in much more likely breeding habitat in my experience. I.e. exactly where I would expect to find them, (Smokeham Bottom isn't prime Silver-studded Blue habitat).

A red letter day indeed!



Silver-studded Blue Photo by Ian Cross

lan Cross: Having seen the first male at the western end of the grazing unit on 22nd June I saw a male in much the same spot on the 25th. On the 27th I saw a male on the diagonal track across the middle of the grazing area, at a site roughly 100m east of the first sighting. I then bumped into Gary Sollis (contractor on site) moments later, who reported seeing a male even further east still.

This marked sightings of males at three separate sites across the reserve. Given what we know about the generally sedentary behaviour of this species the odds were in favour of this being three different individuals. However, I couldn't be 100% sure and I wanted to find evidence that Silver-studded Blues are firmly established.

Well, today (2nd July) I got my evidence, a mating pair not far from the kissing gate at the eastern extremity of the grazing area. To me this 'seals the deal'.

Orange Tip butterfly in Affpuddle garden
Photo by Helen Frost



Bees and Wasps ID

Helen Frost: There was much buzzing and flying around our alliums yesterday - a variety of bees, wasps and a hornet or two ...







Derek Ralls sent the photo above, which he correctly identified as a hornet.

Helen Frost sent the photo above, thinking it was a German Wasp. German Wasp or Common Wasp – unfortunately the critical ID features are on the face!

What do wasps do?

An incredibly popular question, often an exclamation, but one which has a number of surprising answers for many. Wasps are hugely important for a variety of reasons, including:

- Wasps eat flies, aphids, caterpillars and other invertebrates, making them an important insect-controlling predator.
- Wasps are amazing architects, building hexagonal paper nests from chewed up wood.
- Wasps are important pollinators.
- Wasp nests provide a home for some of our most beautiful, pollinating hoverflies.

https://www.buglife.org.uk/bugs/bug-directory/common-wasp/#:~:text=With%20the%20abdomen%20split%20into,merge%20with%20the%20back%20stripes.

A Trapped Grass Snake

Adrian Middleton: The recent Church and Parish events, including those about our special wildlife, were still on my mind when I received a telephone call from Anne Colquhoun concerned for the safety of an immobilised snake of some species or other in her garden. I hurried over and was shown the everstill coils of the snake amongst some strawberry plants. Searching carefully amongst the vegetation I was able to retrieve the animal with the netting in which it was trapped. It was a large adult Grass Snake in good condition, maybe a little short of three feet long and likely as not a female. But what next?

As we all know Grass Snakes can release an obnoxious smelling secretion from anal glands as a defence and that was the case here. Undeterred of course, between us we were able to cut apart the strands of netting which were acting like an ever-tightening noose around its body. The snake was freed! What a relief! Examining the animal carefully, also noting the special features of this snake, I could find no evidence of injury. We then released it into a compost heap some distance from the bed of strawberries with which we had all become very familiar."



Grass Snake in bed of strawberries plus netting. Photo by Anne Colquhoun.

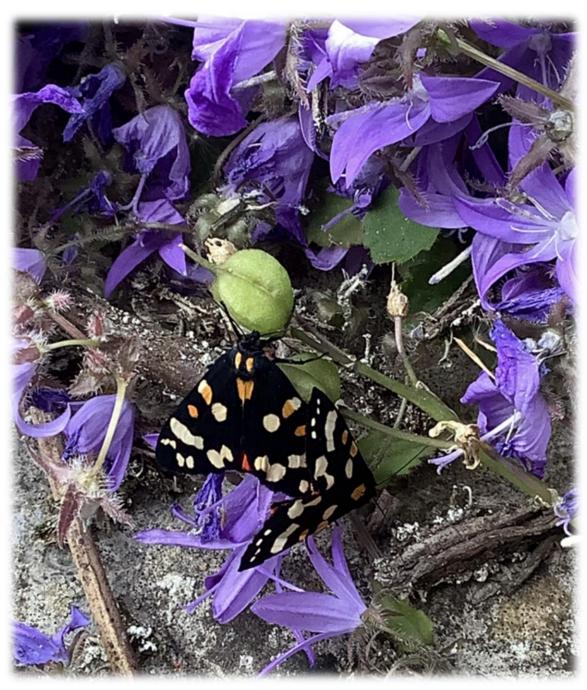


Rescued Grass Snake just before being released. Photo by Anne Colquhoun.

lan Cross: In my experience this is a surprisingly common problem. Loose, flexible netting can be a death-trap for snakes. If you can, it's better to use a more rigid form of mesh or to try and peg it down at the margins so it is kept taut.

Tiger moths

Jane Courtier: This pair of moths appeared to be getting closely acquainted among the campanula plants near our front door this evening. From the wing pattern I believe they are scarlet tiger moths (Callimorpha dominula). Only a tiny glimpse of the bright red underwing can be seen, but the beautifully marked forewings are quite striking enough on their own.



Scarlet Tiger Moths Photo by Jane Courtier

A new dragonfly species record for the garden



Ian Cross: A Male Four-spotted Chaser - a new species for the garden. As an added bonus, this individual was not just visiting but had actually emerged from one of the garden ponds. This brings the garden dragonfly list to 18 species, of which ten have bred, a pretty impressive total.

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor
Please send your contributions to macheetham@hotmail.co.uk.
I will confirm receipt. If you don't hear from me it means I haven't received your email,
so please make contact through
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Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2024/6 15 July 2024



Swallows in Throop Photo by Alec Armitage

Alec Armitage: After 3 years of no swallows in our barn, this year we have a family! Sadly one fell out and didn't make it. These ones are all girls, it was a bloke, I think he jumped!!

Updates from Throop

Vivi Armitage: It has been busy in the garden with hatchings and sightings- a pair of Pied Wagtails nested successfully in the Virginia creeper on the house wall. They were feeding until last week but have fledged now. They were very careful parents and taking a still pic was tricky!

Pied Wagtail. Photo by Vivi Armitage



Vivi Armitage:

It is a miracle of nature that something that hatches out of an egg this size (1.5cm) can then fly to and from Africa.

Swallow Egg Photo by Vivi Armitage





Swallows Photo by Vivi Armitage

Vivi Armitage:

I have had to rescue 2 young Greenfinch which have flown into the conservatory glass. Both recovered.

Right: Rescued Greenfinch. Photo by Vivi Armitage

Below: Viper's Bugloss Photo by Vivi Armitage



Vivi Armitage: A Viper's Bugloss plant seeded itself on our gravel last year and is determined to only grow there, so we've given it space as a Gravel garden. It is a wonderful magnet for bees and many other insects.



Viper's Bugloss Photo by Vivi Armitage



Fox at wildlife pond, Throop

Photo by Vivi Armitage



Wicken Fen (Cambridgeshire) and Erica Trust Heath

Ian Cross: I was interested to see that Wicken Fen has been officially designated a 'Dragonfly Hotspot':

<u>Wicken Fen declared 'dragonfly hotspot' as ancient insects thrive in nature site</u> (msn.com)

I note that 22 species have been recorded there. This fact particularly caught my eye as it just happens to be the same number of species as have been seen on Erica Trust Heath!

Burnet Moths in the Parish



Picture 1:
Six-spot Burnet, the commonest species in the parish, newly-emerged alongside the cocoon
Photo by Ian Cross

lan Cross: A dark shape flies past: although its wings are a blur it seems to be making very slow, almost stately progress through the air. It appears almost black but when it eventually settles – revealing itself to be a clumsy, heavy-bodied moth – it is spectacularly coloured: with deep, metallic green wings marked with scarlet spots.

This is your introduction to one of our burnet moths. Two or three species make their home in the parish but, although they are readily noticed and make no attempt to conceal themselves, they tend to be rather local and we receive remarkably few reports of them.

Which is a shame. Once settled, burnet moths are very approachable – they seem oblivious to danger. There's a reason for this: the caterpillars concentrate cyanide compounds from their foodplants and this toxic protection is passed

via the pupa to the moth. The gorgeous colour schemes: both the black and yellow of the caterpillar (picture 2) and the vivid green and red of the moth, are warnings of their poisonous nature.

Identification involves a quick count of the number of red spots on a forewing. The Six-spot Burnet has three pairs of spots, making six in all (picture 1). Though the pairs sometimes run together, this arrangement rarely varies very much.



Picture 2
Six-spot Burnet caterpillar – the warning colour scheme is black and yellow
Photo by Ian Cross

Though local, the Six-spot is the most widespread species in the parish, found from Moreton Plantation all the way north to Black Hill. Populations can exist on surprisingly restricted patches of their foodplant, Bird's-foot Trefoil. We have had one such colony in our Briantspuddle garden for years. It waxes and wanes enormously in numbers: usually you only see a few of the moths at a time but on one memorable day in 2011 I counted 200 in our garden at one moment, including at least 20 on a single clump of Field Scabious.

In the Five-spot Burnet there is only a single outermost spot, giving only five on each wing (picture 3). This species is more prone to variation but fortunately it's usually possible to discern the basic underlying arrangement, even in extreme forms where all the spots run together into one giant spot (picture 4).



Picture 3: Five-spot Burnet on its caterpillar foodplant, Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil
Photo by Ian Cross



Picture 4: An extreme variety of the Five-spot Burnet Photo by Ian Cross

The Five-spot Burnet favours Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil as a foodplant, so colonies are restricted to marshy localities (at least in our area) and tend to be much more local than the Six-spot.

Now things get tricky! A third species, the Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet, has been recorded from the parish. It also has five red spots on each forewing but, although there are pointers that indicate whether you have a Five-spot or a Narrow-bordered Five-spot, it is impossible to be 100% confident just from looking at the moth itself. To be absolutely sure you need to look at a caterpillar. To the best of my knowledge no-one has examined a caterpillar of the Narrow-bordered Five-spot in the parish yet, so the jury is still out on this species.

3 eating and 5 waiting for a table Photo by Derek Ralls



Green Dock Beetle

Jane Courtier: I spotted this bright green, sparklingly iridescent beetle in the water meadows, on a wild plant which I believe was Pale Persicaria (also known as lady's thumb). From a quick search on the internet, I think the beetle is the green dock beetle, *Gastrophysa viridula*. As their name suggests, the beetles' favourite food is docks, but they apparently also eat other plants in the same family - which includes Persicaria.



Green Dock Beetle Photo by Jane Courtier

Daytime Nightjar!

Photo by Helen Frost

A bit of a surprise as I was walking Watson at Oakers this morning (4 June)! This male was just sitting there very happily!



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 2024/7 1 August 2024



Median Wasps Photo by Iain Freeman

Iain Freeman: A continuing 'thank you' to you and all the contributors to the wildlife bulletins; it is always an education and a pleasure receiving them.

Some wasps (Median wasps, I believe) built a paper nest in some brambles about a foot above the ground, where I unintentionally disturbed them with a strimmer. They deployed their attack force when I was only inches away and saved the nest. Here is an image of the nest, but I am not going to supply pictures of my face or hands.

BWARS (Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society) states the following:

The second largest British social wasp species. *D. media* was first recorded in 1980 in Sussex, since when it has spread over all of England and Wales, and

much of southern Scotland. It has a short life cycle, with nests finishing in August.

Nests are aerial and generally exposed, usually hanging from trees or bushes.



https://bwars.com/content/beginners-bees-wasps-ants-dolichovespula-media-median-wasp

Key features

- The workers generally resemble other yellow and black social wasps
- almost black colour forms are often encountered with greatly reduced yellow banding on the abdomen.
- All castes have yellow markings on the top and front-sides of the thorax which are said to resemble the NIKE logo, or when viewed from above look like two back-to-back, or mirrored, number 7's.

Back Copies of "Butterfly" "Saving butterflies, moths and our environment"

Free to anyone interested: Back copies of Butterfly (published by Butterfly Conservation). Packed with useful info. Let Margaret know.

Emperor Moth Caterpillar

Fully grown at about 6 cm long. Photo by Adrian Middleton



Bindweeds in the parish

Ian Cross: With their unmistakeable white trumpets, you may be forgiven for thinking that a bindweed is a bindweed – end of story. There are in fact three species in our parish: two of them widespread and frequent, one much more local.

The most familiar is the Hedge Bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*) and the one against which, other bindweeds should be compared. This is the plant that is the bane of gardeners, with its indestructible underground rhizomes, even small fragments of which will rapidly develop into a whole new plant.

The trumpets are about 30 to 40 mm across, picture 1. As a *Calystegia* the base of the trumpet is clasped by two leafy, 'bracteoles' like a pair of baseball catcher's gloves. These are important in distinguishing it from its rarer

lookalike, Large Bindweed (*Calystegia sylvatica*). The trumpets in that species are generally significantly bigger at 60 to 75 mm across (picture 2).



Picture 1: the familiar white trumpet of Hedge Bindweed. Photo by Ian Cross



Picture 2: Large Bindweed – always found near human settlements. Photo by Ian Cross

However, both species vary in size and to be confident in your identification you need to look at the bracteoles. In Hedge Bindweed these don't, or only barely, overlap and the ridge on the back is gently curved, tapering gradually down to the stalk (picture 3). In Large Bindweed there is a large area of overlap and the ridge on the back bulges out strongly, before making a sharp turn and meeting the stalk at a right angle (picture 4).



Left - Picture 3: The bracteoles clasping the base of the flower in Hedge Bindweed Right - Picture 4: Bracteoles of Large Bindweed. Photos by Ian Cross

Whilst Hedge Bindweed probably sprawls across every hedgerow and mature garden in the parish, Large Bindweed is decidedly local. As an introduction, it's much more tied to the neighbourhood of human settlements than its smaller cousin but, although there's a population in Affpuddle, I have yet to encounter it in Briantspuddle.

The third bindweed is Field Bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*). It's by and large a bit smaller – up to 30mm across – and set apart from the other two in a few other features. It doesn't have the leafy, clasping 'catcher's gloves' at the base of the trumpets, which simply end at a round nodule. The leaves are more triangular, with the basal points sticking out to the sides and meeting the stalk in a straight line (picture 5).



Picture 5: Field Bindweed. Photo by Ian Cross.

Field Bindweed will grow happily at the base of a hedge but doesn't usually sprawl all over it. Unlike the other two it is at home in rough grassland, well away from hedges. Generally, it prefers more open, sunny situations to shade. One regular feature of Field Bindweed is the presence of pink forms (picture 6). These apparently occur in the other two but must be very rare – I have never seen them myself.



Picture 6: Field Bindweed frequently comes in a pink form. Photo by Ian Cross.

Being familiar, bindweeds have attracted a plethora of local names. My favourite is the one I was taught many years ago for Hedge Bindweed: 'Grandmother, grandmother, pop out of bed'. If you firmly squeeze the very base of the flower, the white trumpet pops out from between the bracteoles, just like a Victorian matriarch in a flowing white nightshirt leaping out of bed. Interestingly, this works equally well for Large Bindweed but, it's almost impossible to get Field Bindweed to do this – believe me, I've tried!

A House Sparrow: literally!

Adrian Middleton: Very recently I found this fledgling sparrow on the window sill inside the utility room - a "house" sparrow in fact. It was "frozen" to the spot, remaining absolutely motionless for several minutes. Its behaviour made it easy for me to pick it up and release it gently outside where it flew off to join others with lots of chirping.



Photo by Adrian Middleton

Culpepper's Dish

Ian Cross: I have long considered Culpepper's Dish to be one of the underappreciated gems of the parish. Whatever the management policy is, it is clearly working for wildlife, with an interesting range of recorded species of both flora and fauna.

This is largely due to a combination of: the crushed limestone surface, the low bunds with sunny, south-facing sides and the mowing regime. The latter keeps the grass short enough to keep the rank growth in check but not so short that the flower-rich margins become a billiard table.

I must admit that I was a bit puzzled by a recent innovation: the patches of unmown, coarse grass surrounded by wooden posts. They seemed like a lot of effort for a small block of contrasting, but not particularly species-rich, habitat.

However, I was passing Culpepper's Dish yesterday (23rd July) and was struck by the number of Six-spot Burnet moths I encountered. There were at least 9 in evidence at any one moment, including two mating pairs.

I checked my records and noted I haven't previously recorded them there. This is possibly an oversight rather than a new colony, but burnet moths have clearly been at such a low density in the immediate area that they didn't impinge on my senses.

Out of interest I did a count of the number of cocoons in evidence - always a useful proxy for colony strength – and then the penny dropped. Every cocoon I could find was on a grass stem in one of the two unmown patches!

I don't know if this was the aim of the policy but it has obviously stimulated a surge in the strength of this, very local, population.

Grass Snake slough

Adrian Middleton: This recently taken photo shows the skin slough from the head of a large Grass Snake. The different head scale sizes show well, including the transparent "brille", the scale which covers each eye: as well as reflecting light the rather unusual green colouring is from the bracken behind



Photo by Adrian Middleton

Mink at Throop

Photo by Helen Frost



There are many useful websites that cover American Mink (an invasive species brought in for fur farms in the 1960s). They pose a threat to Water Voles and Seabirds in particular. Here are a couple of websites:

https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-american-mink/

https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/mammals/american-mink

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
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ID Questions

Ron Hoyle:

2 pictures of a large caterpillar (just over2½") on a fuchsia.

I'd be grateful if you could identify this caterpillar which I have not seen before.

This looks like a splendid specimen





ID Questions

Ron Hoyle:

Also a rather small photo of what I think is a Wood Tiger moth which may have strayed from the heath.

Also I have not seen one of these in the garden before. Perhaps they are returning given the restitution of the heath?





Ian Cross: It's that time of year again: Elephant Hawk-moth caterpillar and Jersey Tiger (alas, not Wood Tiger, that's never been found in the parish - wrong habitat!)

Ron Hoyle: thanks so much, very interesting. Are both of these insects quite common?

Ian Cross: Both are fairly common and have featured in newsletter articles: the Elephant Hawk-moth caterpillar in 2020:148 and the Jersey Tiger in 2023:17.

ID Questions

Adrian Middleton:

The attached photo is of a Hoverfly I saw recently at Pallington.

Friends and I believe it may be "The Footballer"

Helophilus pendulus,
although there are slight
differences from one we saw
on line and of course small
variations within the species



may be the rule. The sighting seems to fit in with the new football season! I wonder if Ian would comment on regarding its identification please.



Helophilus pendulus Photo by Adrian Middleton

Ian Cross: Yes, a male *Helophilus pendulus*. Of the three Dorset *Helophilus* this is easily the commonest. It's the 'default' against which other species must be compared.

Roesel's Bush-cricket

Photos by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton:

Friends in a neighbouring parish have long been able to show me Roesel's Bush-cricket in their garden usually dodging behind stems



of tall grasses . So, after decades without sightings at my home, finally seeing one sitting on an outside window ledge came as a surprise. Appearing very docile I was able to transfer it onto the terrace wall, photograph it and show it to Alice and her parents who had come over for a few days.

At the time I believed this Bush-cricket was uncommon. It had short wings and relied on hopping but sometimes these insects have long wings suitable for flying away on migration.

When my family visitors went home, many miles away, guess what was practically the first thing they saw in their garden? It was a Roesel's Bushcricket! So it looks as though these Bush-crickets are more common than I had imagined."



A 6-Belted Clearwing

Jamie McMillan: I have just started pheromone luring, and got 6-belted Clearwing the first time I tried it...presumably it is on some of the Birds Foot Trefoil on the verges.



6-Belted Clearwing. Photo by Jamie McMillan

Ian Cross: I know that the Six-belted Clearwing breeds regularly in our immediate area and have long suspected it might occur in the gardens but have yet to see it here - so yours is a welcome find.

It's the one clearwing where you stand a chance of encountering it regularly without the use of pheromone lures and thus studying aspects of its behaviour and life history. I notice that it's the only species on the Dorset Moths website with any images at all of the early stages.

I've recorded it from four of the kilometre squares in the parish and have been lucky enough to see mating and oviposition locally.

Four of the nine Dorset clearwings have been recorded in the parish and we even had an item on them in the newsletter last year (2023/11). However, I suspect other species must be present. If you are using lures hopefully we will see more additions to the list.

Large Red-belted, Sallow, Orange-tailed and Six-belted Clearwings have been recorded in the parish. I have also recorded Red-tipped in neighbouring parishes.

Wikipedia states: The Sesiidae or clearwing moths are a diurnal moth family in the order Lepidoptera known for their Batesian mimicry* in both appearance and behaviour of various Hymenoptera. The family consists of 165 genera spread over two subfamilies, containing in total 1525 species and 49 subspecies, most of which occur in the tropics, though there are many species in the Northern Hemisphere as well, including over a hundred species known to occur in Europe.

*Batesian mimicry is a form of mimicry where a harmless species has evolved to imitate the warning signals of a harmful species directed at a predator of them both. It is named after the English naturalist Henry Walter Bates, who worked on butterflies in the rainforests of Brazil.

Jamie McMillan: Most moth-trappers will attract caddis adults, though few of us can identify more than a handful. One regular is *Mystacides longicornis*, or 'Grouse-wing', with obvious Black and Tan stripes, as well as very long antennae:



Mystacides longicornis Photo by Jamie McMillan

It has a close relative, *Mystacides azurea*, which is a stunning insect with its glowing red eyes and iridescent green (or blue) patches on the black wings. I caught this for the first time this week in the moth trap. Apparently the males have a communal display flight over water, which I'd love to see!



Mystacides azurea Photo by Jamie McMillan

Jamie McMillan: Re Burnets - I get 6-spot here more or less annually, and have had one of the Five-spots on a fleeting visit but it was too quick for me to catch. Same with Mother Shipton. Very poor year for butterflies, but last two nights have been snowed under with moths!

A visit to heathland

Adrian Middleton: In mid-August I revisited the heathland where the going gets tough. It was overcast but warm and humid with very little wind. Almost straight away I spotted a female Wasp Spider busy putting the finishing touches to a web round a comparatively large insect which was still struggling to escape. I decided to go back for a photograph later. Carrying on, I saw two sub-adult Adders but they soon moved away. I then saw a small Grass Snake which behaved rather similarly.

There were one or two blues and gatekeeper butterflies along with a few hoverflies along the way. It was then that I saw what I thought was a fine example of a male Oak Eggar moth fluttering about amongst some grasses. I took a photograph of it only then realising, rather unfortunately, that it was missing its left forewing. Checking the location of the Wasp Spider I found it had also disappeared, along with its prey. A bit later on I spotted a three foot

long Grass Snake near a clump of heather. Rather unusually it was more obliging and I managed to photograph it.

It had proved to be an interesting walk.



Grass Snake Photo by Adrian Middleton

Silver-washed Fritillary in a Briantspuddle garden

Photo by Jamie McMillan



Female Wheatear at West Farm, Affpuddle.

Photo by Helen Frost



White-tailed Eagles

Ian Cross: Yesterday (2nd August) I saw two White-tailed Eagles over the Moreton Forest area at about 1120. They were adult/nearly adult birds with fully white tails - I assume the pair that are headquartered around Poole Harbour.

They circled relatively low - roughly two to three times treetop height - over the Clouds Hill/Bovington escarpment, gradually gaining height. Perhaps they were using morning thermals generated by the low ridge.

What first attracted my attention was their continuous calling as initially - until I could find a better viewpoint -they were concealed behind the conifers. They were being dive-bombed by a Buzzard which was also calling.

The three birds climbed higher and higher. When they reached a suitable height, the two eagles broke off and headed, one behind the other, in a direct and fast glide towards the west (not east towards Poole Harbour as I might have expected). The buzzard trailed them at first, the three birds flying in single file, but soon peeled off, satisfied it had driven away the intruders. I was impressed by the relative size of the two species: the eagles being almost twice the wingspan of the smaller buzzard.

I watched the eagles moving progressively westwards until they disappeared from sight.

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

Trevor Poole: I found these two spongy/sticky/weird things growing on old pine wood in my field yesterday - any idea what they are and if they are poisonous to animals?

Ian Cross: It's a Slime Mould. This one looks like *Fuligo septica* the 'Dog Vomit Slime Mould'. Despite it's disgusting appearance - and even more disgusting name - it's totally harmless.

Slime Moulds aren't fungi, though in many ways they look and behave like them. Instead they actually belong among that great group of single-celled organisms: the Protozoa.

The Protozoa

A little more on the Protozoa, with the help of Wikipedia!



Clockwise from top left: *Blepharisma japonicum*, a ciliate; *Giardia muris*, a parasitic flagellate; *Centropyxis aculeata*, a testate (shelled) amoeba; *Peridinium willei*, a dinoflagellate; *Chaos carolinense*, a naked amoebozoan; *Desmarella moniliformis*, a choanoflagellate

Respectively: Frank Fox, Sergey Karpov, CDC/ Dr. Stan Erlandsen, Picturepest, Thierry Arnet, dr.Tsukii Yuuji - Derived from:Mikrofoto.de-Blepharisma japonicum 15.jpgDesmarella moniliformis.jpgGiardia muris trophozoite SEM 11643.jpgPeridinium willei - 400x - Dinoflagellate (15058894916).jpgCollection Penard MHNG Specimen 88-4-3 Centropyxis aculeata.tifChaos carolinense.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=67536071

William visits Affpuddle



William holding a grass snake Photo by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: Just before the late August Bank Holiday William, Lindy and I headed off to some local heathland in search of reptiles and other wildlife where we had been a couple of times before. Our visit had hardly begun when we spotted a sub-adult golden-coloured Slow Worm. After that matters went rather quiet and we spent time studying the various species of flowering heather, also noting the sundews and other small flowers before coming across a large stretch where bracken bashing had taken place. We noticed the bracken stems had been damaged, without severing them. The object of this is to weaken plant growth, so the following year hopefully there would be less bracken where it was not welcome, so giving other plants a better chance.

Walking on, rather unexpectedly, we saw a recently-born Common Lizard darting about rather frantically on a patch of open ground. It appeared black and was about four centimetres long, including the tail. The female Common Lizard and Slow Worm give birth to live young in late summer, joining juvenile Sand Lizards hatched from eggs laid earlier on.

Almost straight away we then saw an adult male Smooth Snake somewhat dwarfed by an adjoining large Grass Snake, a heavyweight some three feet long, which I also managed to catch with a bit of help from Lindy.



Male Smooth snake Photo by Adrian Middleton

William showed considerable interest in both, but especially the Grass Snake, which to his credit he was keen to handle despite the smell it made! We noted the usual head and neck markings along with mottling on its underside.

After this there was another lull in reptile activity as the weather became very warm. But as we made our way back William spotted a further Smooth Snake lying deep in cover, where presumably it was bit cooler, reminiscent of an encounter with one on a previous visit. This was an adult female so we were able to compare the two sexes including the usual colouring underneath the body – black in the female and copper-coloured in the male. Well done, William. We had had an interesting walk, with plenty to talk about on our way home

Plumehorn Hoverflies in the parish

Volucella. It's quite a useful term, instantly calling to mind their miniature 'bottle-brush', feathery antennae. Though, you have to look pretty closely to appreciate this feature. This group includes some of our largest and most spectacular hoverflies, and many are impressive mimics of wasps and bumblebees.

All five of the British species have been recorded in the parish and four of these are fairly widespread and regularly encountered.

The most widely noted is the Bumblebee Plumehorn, *Volucella bombylans*. As its name suggests it is a fairly convincing bumblebee mimic. It comes in two colour forms: the variety known as *'plumata'* copies the many common blackand-yellow bumblebee species (picture 1).



Picture 1: Furry and black-and-yellow, the 'plumata' form of the Bumblebee Plumehorn is a fairly convincing mimic of black-and-yellow bumblebee species. Photo by Ian Cross

The 'bombylans' variety is a 'dead ringer' for the Red-tailed Bumblebee (picture 2).

Picture 2: The 'bombylans' variety copies Red-tailed Bumblebees. Photo by Ian Cross.



Just as widespread and common, the splendid Pied Plumehorn *Volucella pellucens* is readily identified by the pale, almost translucent, band across the otherwise mainly black body (picture 3). It's a common species of mature gardens and leafy, woodland rides.



Picture 3: The aptly-named Pied Plumehorn is mainly black and white Photo by Ian Cross



Picture 4: Hornet Plumehorn, our largest British hoverfly. Photo by Ian Cross.

The Hornet Plumehorn, *Volucella zonaria*, is usually thought of as a good hornet mimic: judge for yourself as you look at picture 4. However, here I part company with many hoverfly admirers. I don't think the mimicry is that good.

On the continent is another species called *Milesia crabroniformis*. Now that really is a convincing copy of a hornet – I've been taken-in many times. *Milesia* seems to be on the cusp of colonising the British Isles. If it does become established we will be faced with a dilemma: what are we going to call it if the Hornet name is already taken?

The Hornet Plumehorn used be regarded as a rare vagrant to the UK but, like so many insects, climate change has enabled it to become widely established in southern England. It's now a regular visitor to parish gardens. The larvae are scavengers and predators of baby wasps: probably mainly using the German Wasp, which is one of our commonest social wasps in the parish. I often wonder if the hoverfly is really mimicking that species rather than the hornet.

When I first became interested in hoverflies, the Wasp Plumehorn, *Volucella inanis*, was a rare species, most likely to be encountered in the 'warmer east' such as the Poole/Bournemouth conurbation. However, it is following in the footsteps of the Hornet Plumehorn, and gradually expanding westwards.

The Wasp Plumehorn is quite similar to its, only slightly larger, cousin (see picture 5) and great care needs to be taken in separating the two species. To be absolutely sure you need to closely examine the second body plate on the underside of the abdomen. This is black in the Hornet Plumehorn and dull yellowish in the Wasp Plumehorn. It is becoming almost as common in our parish garden, to the extent that I consider any records of 'Hornet Plumehorn' as unreliable unless supported by a good, close-up photo or a specimen.

The fifth parish species is the Orange-belted Plumehorn, *Volucella inflata*. It resembles a black and orange version of the Pied Plumehorn but remains very scarce and local in our area. It's often thought of as an ancient woodland specialist. I have yet to see it in the parish – so haven't illustrated it here – but there is an old record for Oakers Wood.



Picture 5: Wasp Plumehorn. Care is needed in separating from the Hornet Plumehorn.

Photo by Ian Cross.

Bird Report for August 2024

Roger Hewitt: It was a slow start, but Swallows, House Martins and Sand Martins started moving early, with at least four large groups passing through the Briantspuddle and Throop water meadows, with lots of juvenile birds amongst them. This is good news.

The Marsh Tit has almost become a resident in my garden, and a brief female Yellowhammer was nice as well. Goshawks showed a few times on Affpuddle Heath, with a juvenile almost parting my hair.

While walking the Throop to Turnerspuddle route, I observed 4 Grey Wagtails by Throop Farm, and the Kingfisher showing better of late on the river.

Moving on to Gully Lane, and I saw a few Yellowhammers, with 10 Stonechats and the first flock of Linnets feeding on the wasted corn in the fields. Also a few finches were starting to get together.

The central meadows are doing okay as well, with at least 8 Reed Buntings feeding on the dried grass and docks in the meadow. I think two pairs of Stonechats bred in the meadow. Also seen here were a juvenile Reed Warbler, 2 Green Sandpipers flying around the meadow and a Great White Egret which was sitting in a tree with a Heron.

I know one pair of Spotted Flycatchers bred, but others should be moving through now. However, I have only seen one other so I hope that more will pass through in the next couple of weeks.

It went a bit quiet for a week or so, then on the 27th August, I walked to Turnerspuddle Heath in the evening sunshine and I spotted 3 Common Redstarts together - 2 male and 1 female. I turned around and spotted a young Pied Flycatcher watching me. So a good night. Then some Juvenile Dartford Warblers flying around made it even better.

I tried again the next night, but they had moved on. However, I saw a nice juvenile Common Whitethroat. They are not as common as they used to be. The best site in our parish is Rogers Hill Farm.

The local Hobby showed a few nights when chasing the Swallows.

I think everyone has seen the Barn Owl.

I also managed to see juvenile Nightjars on the heath and a brief encounter with a Marsh Harrier. Yellow Wagtails have been a bit scarce so far this year – I have only seen 2 up to now, so I'm hoping for a few more in September.

And to finish off, I spotted a juvenile Dartford Warbler on Erica Trust Land, but I do not think that it had bred there.



Common Whitethroat. Photo by Roger Hewitt.



Common Redstart. Photo by Roger Hewitt.



Above: Marsh Tit Photo by Roger Hewitt



Above: Pied Flycatcher. Below: Dartford Warbler. Photos by Roger Hewitt.



Convolvulus moth in the garden - a big un!

Photos by Helen Frost

Helen Frost: A bit of a surprise last week when I got the washing in!





Emperor Moth caterpillarOakers Wood Photo by Helen Frost



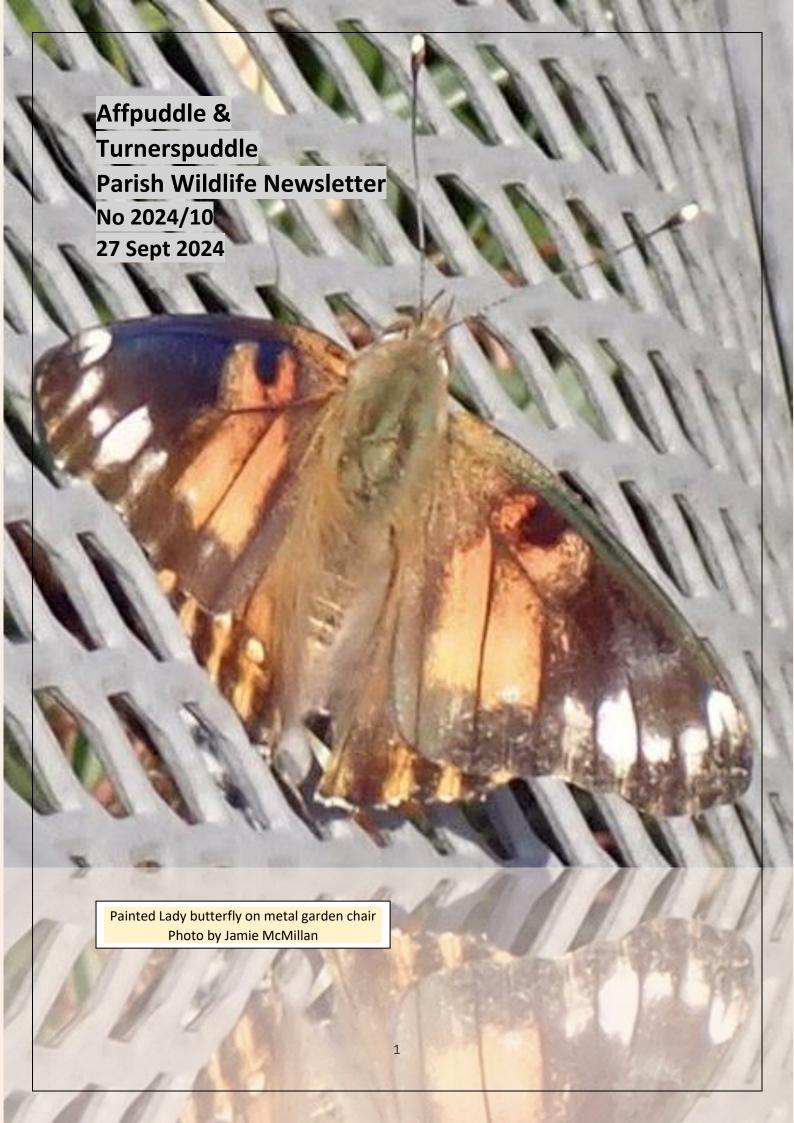
Dark Bush-cricketPhoto by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: Insects in my garden have been a bit limited this year but after seeing a Roesel's Bush-cricket recently, I spotted this Dark Bush-cricket on a hydrangea leaf.

Apparently common, it was nevertheless another "first" for me here. I noticed it had very small wings and was inclined to crawl as well as hop, but obviously not fly.



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Jamie McMillan: This was feeding on my bedrooom window Buddleja yesterday for a short time in the morning. I just managed to catch a photo of some of the upperside as it was sunning on my metal garden chair before it disappeared, though I saw it again briefly in the afternoon. The photo doesn't do justice to the hindwing uppers, with black stripes along the veins, but it didn't like to rest with its wings open.

I can't remember ever having seen an aberrant *V.cardui* before. Will be watching my Buddleia intensively today and have a net at the ready!

Ian Cross: Painted Ladies have been relatively scarce this year - it certainly won't go down as a bumper year - so any sightings are welcome.

Though variation in size is quite common - probably due to differences in nutritional intake as larvae - and the background shade varies in depth of colour, the Painted Lady is notoriously invariable in pattern. This is an extreme variety called *rogeri*. It's quite rare - I've certainly never seen one. An impressive find!



Painted Lady Photo by Jamie McMillan



Painted Lady Photo by Jamie McMillan

Purple & Gold Moths in the Parish

Ian Cross: Pyrausta is a group of delightful, little day-flying moths. Six species are found in Dorset, of which three have resident populations in our parish. They are variable in colouring, so there's no common name that embraces all the species, but a few are known popularly as 'Purple & Golds' for reasons that should soon become clear.

All three will come readily to light and are frequently seen in moth traps locally, but to me they are the very essence of localities where short, flowery turf bakes under the hot summer sun.

Despite its name, the Common Purple & Gold *Pyrausta purpuralis* (picture 1), is possibly the least numerous and predictable in its presence in our area. Its main caterpillar foodplants are thymes, which don't feature on the parish plant list. This may explain its relative scarcity compared with the next two species.

However, I suspect it can use other related plants in the mint family when thymes are absent.



Picture 1 Common Purple & Gold Photo by Ian Cross

The Mint Moth *Pyrausta aurata* — sometimes known as the Small Purple & Gold — is the most 'domestic' of our three species. It is the one most likely to have established colonies breeding in gardens, where the caterpillar feeds on a wide variety of plants in the mint family, as the name suggests. In our garden — where we grow at least two species of mint along with Wild Marjoram, Wild Basil and Common Calamint — the dazzling purple and yellow moths are constant companions from spring to September.

The forewing of the Mint Moth is dominated by one round spot of a rich orange-yellow, like the yolk of an egg (picture 2). Though, this may be accompanied to a greater or lesser extent by a few other spots – these moths do vary a great deal in details of the pattern. This contrasts with the more wishy-washy yellow of the Common Purple & Gold, where the markings are more likely to form a broken band.



Picture 2 Mint Moth Photo by Ian Cross

When it comes to rich purple and yellow colours, the Straw-barred Pearl *Pyrausta despicata*, rather lets the team down. The name 'despicata' means despicable or contemptible: which I think is an outrageous bit of moth colourshaming. Personally, I find the subtle pale cream and brown pattern quite attractive in its own way (picture 3).



Picture 3 Straw-barred Pearl Photo by Ian Cross

The caterpillars feed on plantains – in contrast to the general 'minty' theme of its close relatives. Which may lead you to wonder why this moth isn't all over every lawn in the parish – areas that tend to be studded with the rosettes of plantain leaves. (At least if they're anything like our lawn!) However, I find that at their breeding sites the moths prefer short, open flowery turf where there is plenty of hot, bare ground, as in the photo. Maybe they need the extra warmth for caterpillar development.

American Mink in the Piddle

Philippa Coates: Just a quick note to ask if you think there are many mink in the river? We watched one crossing the small stream at the second bridge the other morning and we are concerned for the precious wildlife we have here. It was a surprise as I have not seen mink often. To make up for our worries we did see a Kingfisher on our walk by the river to Throop.

Ian Cross: Unfortunately, Mink are common in the parish.

This invasive mustelid is present on rivers across much of the UK after many escaped, or were released, from fur farms in the 1960s and 1970s. Much smaller than an otter and closer to a polecat in size, mink have a dark brown to black coat, small ears and a floppy black tail (unlike an otter's tail, which is always very pointed). Active during the day and night, they can show up anywhere, but it is usual to see them when exploring canals and small streams.

Mink can have a devastating impact on local wildlife in the places they establish themselves and contribute to the reduction of river birds like kingfishers and small mammals such as water voles. Nation-wide efforts are regularly made to control mink numbers, but they are intelligent and adaptable mammals, so it is likely that they are here to stay.

https://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/blog/thewildlifetrusts/marvellous-mustelids

Strange Behaviour

Kai Merriam (Victoria, Canada): I found this bee in a flower in the middle of the night – it seemed to be 'asleep', but 'woke up' when I disturbed it - therefore not dead. I'm wondering if you could provide insight?



Honey Bee in flower Photo by Kai Merriam

Ian Cross: This looks like a honeybee. It's unusual for them not to return to their hive overnight - why spend the night in a flower when you have a warm, dry, **safe** place to go to?

I know of one thing that can cause this strange behaviour. Parasitic flies of the family Conopidae lay their eggs in living bees. The flies ambush the bees, prise apart the armoured body plates, inject an egg through the soft tissue between the plates and then fly away. All this takes part in a fraction of a second. All the observer will see is what looks like a momentary collision, with both insects then flying off with no obvious problems.

As the fly larva develops inside the bee, it changes the bee's behaviour. The bee continues to forage but has a reduced capacity to carry nectar, it spends less and less time at the hive, eventually ceasing to return for the night at all. It seeks cooler places to sleep. In time it dies and an adult fly emerges from the body.

I'm not familiar with the Canadian species of Conopidae, I assume they won't be so very different to the species we see in the UK. They are actually quite common flies - we get a few species here in our garden every summer. Try Googling them if you're interested in which species you get in your area.

A Spider Reserve

Jamie McMillan: My rewilded lawn has turned into a spider reserve! I've never known so many - helped by eagle-eyed Toby (ex-RSPB) who is brilliant at finding them. He got to 12 on the main lawn area! As he pointed out, the webs are always tucked down in a hollow, perpendicular to the ground, so you need to get level with them to have the best chance of finding them. It makes sense as the gaps are exactly where the orthoptera hop across - it is exactly the same principle as a mist net for birds.

Anyway, I looked today at a nearby one that I was keeping track of once the rain stopped, and found it had made one of its hyper-distinctive egg cases: a great photo-opportunity as it was near the edge of the long grass.

Ian Cross: An excellent find. It's been a good year for wasp spiders. We get them in our garden regularly but some of the best colonies are on the fringes of wet heath and bog where they sometimes occur in astonishing numbers. They have featured a few times in the newsletter, including an article in 2021/171



Wasp Spider in Briantspuddle garden Photo by Jamie McMillan

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
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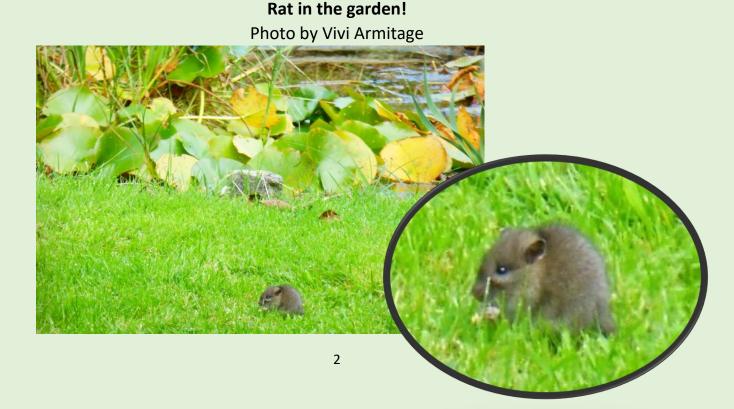
Eyed Ladybird

Ian Cross: About 43 species of ladybird have been recorded in Dorset but few are as spectacular as this beauty. Reaching 8 to 9 mm, the Eyed Ladybird (*Anatis ocellata*) is Britain's largest species. It's also one of the most unmistakeable, with each of the black spots surrounded by a pale yellow halo. This impression of an eye, with pale surround and dark iris, gives it both its common and scientific names.

For all its size, the Eyed Ladybird is very infrequently encountered – nothing even approaching the number of observations for the ubiquitous Seven-spot and Harlequin Ladybirds, which are surely top of the league when it comes to records.

The reason for this is that the Eyed Ladybird specialises in feeding on aphids on pines. So, although it is associated with the widespread Scot's Pine, it mainly keeps to the tree canopy from where it rarely strays. The adults seem to have absolutely no interest in flowers, so I have no little tricks or shortcuts to recommend for finding them.

It's more a case of waiting for one to find you. This example flew past me on a sunny October afternoon just north of Oakers Wood.



Autumn Migration

Roger Hewitt: I always look forward to the autumn migration but it started a bit slow this year, then on September 9th while walking on Turnerspuddle Heath a Wryneck flew up in front of me and it flew into a hawthorn tree.

Although I could see it quite well, I could not get my bridge camera to focus on the bird, which sat there for about 10 minutes and then flew into a bit of army land that was out of bounds.

And so I lost my chance!

However, I have included this photo of a Wryneck that I found on Portland, so the people who do not know this bird know what I am talking about.



Wryneck on Portland Photo by Roger Hewitt

Also on September 9th I walked the Briantspuddle meadow in the evening found our first Whinchat of the autumn. Altogether we had four, and two stayed until the 20th September.

I was in the meadow again on the 16th September and I observed 3 more Spotted Flycatchers and my only Northern Wheatear, with quite a few Chiffchaffs passing through - with the juveniles looking very smart.



Whinchat Photo by Roger Hewitt

On September 18th a Red Kite flew over the meadow, but continued on eastwards. We do not see many in the autumn.

On September 19th I took a long walk to Turnerspuddle, up to Black Hill and back down Kite Hill. I didn't see many birds, but a few Mistle Thrush are starting to appear. Two Hobbies flew over my head and four more Spotted Flycatchers, so their numbers are improving.



Spotted Flycatcher Photo by Roger Hewitt

I looked at the fishing lake by Moor Lane and saw 8 Mandarins – 6 males and 2 females.

On September 24th I was in the meadow again and observed the first returning Snipe was near one of the new scrapes. With September coming to an end it's wet and windy again, but good numbers of Swallows and even better numbers of House Martins are making their way south in the evening. That was nice to see.

Our numbers are down this year, but I have seen some big counts from other parts of the country - so don't despair!

So let's hope that the migration goes well into October.



Roe Deer Photo by Vivi Armitage

WILD BERE REGIS

Exhibition by Bere Regis parish council wildlife group
Drax Hall October 19th, 10-00h – 16.00h.
Drax Hall (96 North Street BH20 7LD)

Exhibits will be high quality photography of our local landscape and wildlife with closeups, descriptions and some art work. In addition we will provide advice from Dorset Wildlife Trust on encouraging wildlife in gardens.

Our Parish – Why it is a special area for wildlife.

- 1 Landscape features and Geology
- 2. History how our ancestors have created the countryside we have today. Woodbury Hill, Iron Age Fort, Romans, The Beere Royal Forest, King John, Turbeville Manor.)
- 3. Designated conservation sites Legally nationally designated SSSIs, and county designated SNCIs.
- 4 Conservation areas

Wild Woodbury (including the background history of the site), Mays Wood, Souls Moor village nature reserve.

5. Village and community sites Churchyard, Gardens, walks, 'wild areas'

6 Public areas Roadside verges and walls

THESE LOCATIONS COMBINE TO CREATE CONNECTIVITY FOR WILDLIFE.
The exhibition will be held in association with Dorset Wildlife Trust
A key objective if the exhibition is to provide information on the wildlife within the parish and attract more volunteers to the wildlife group.



At the bird bath Photos by Vivi Armitage

Featuring:

Sparrow, Chiffchaff, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Robin, Greenfinch & Goldfinch.

Vivi Armitage: On what appears to have been the only sunny and still autumn day on 4th October, there was a veritable queue for our bird bath. The deal would appear to be that if I fill it up with rainwater just before the Sun gets onto it, in they go - the Blue Tit and ChiffChaff are usually 1st!

We keep the old rake leaning up against the bird bath as many of them perch on that before they have a drink or a bath. Most irritatingly, I had just put the camera down when a kingfisher appeared to sit on top of the rake which was an unusual treat.











Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
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Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter No 2024/12 5 November 2024



Ben Visits the parish and holds a Smooth Snake. Photo by Chris Burnham

Ben visits the Parish

Adrian Middleton: In early autumn I met up with Ben and his father again to visit some local heath and catch up on our wildlife news. Ben is now twelve.

Just before their arrival I had rescued an Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar rather too close to the back doorstep for its safety but not that far away from some fuchsias, a favoured food source. It was the usual grey colour, looking a bit like an elephant's trunk. It was interesting when Ben was able to show me a photograph of the less common green variety of this caterpillar he had seen.

It was somewhat overcast as we then set off for the heath, aware of the risk of thunderstorms. We pressed on and were soon to see a couple of half-grown slow worms with stripes along their bodies. A good start with more of interest to follow.



Palmate Newt Photo by Chris Burnham

Ben was as enthusiastic and diligent as ever and within minutes of turning over one or two very small rather insignificant looking pieces of wood, spotted what initially I thought was a rather odd-looking Sand Lizard but which in fact was a juvenile newt. Whilst always difficult to differentiate between immature Palmate and Smooth Newts the distribution of the markings on its underside, revealing a pale unspotted throat would help indicate it was a Palmate Newt.

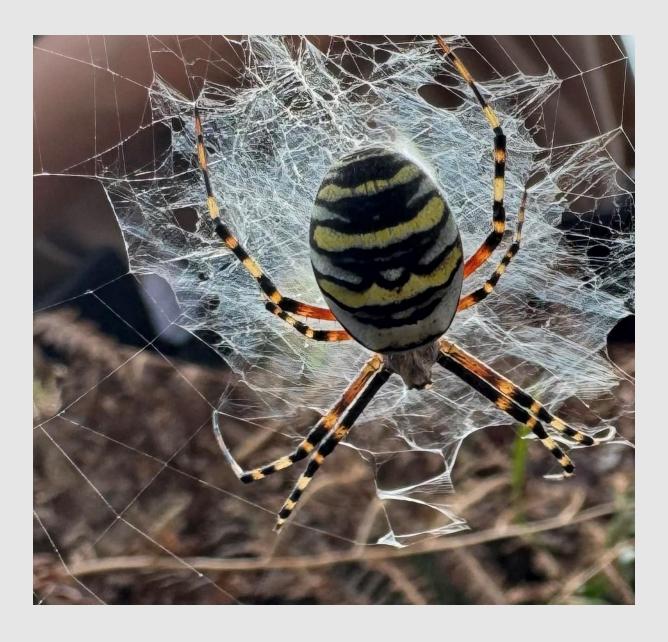
We moved on and soon saw a Green Woodpecker showing mostly its yellow back markings as it flew away and then, flying fast and low between clumps of heather, the dark silhouette of a very secretive Dartford Warbler.

As we braced ourselves for a climb up a steep bank, Ben, well in the lead by now, called us over to a female Wasp Spider he had done well to spot. It was in the middle of its web, only a very few inches above ground level. Its black and yellow wasp-like markings were clear to see, something which should help keep predators away. I was particularly pleased about this, already aware of Ben's special interest in spiders over several years.

We then came across a rather large, dug out sand scrape, the sort favoured by Sand Lizards for laying their eggs. Still in our element, we also had a good look at a couple of male Smooth Snakes we had discovered, noting their different head and neck markings with spots and bars, something which I tend to call a "bar-code".

By now the sun was blazing down and it was time to head for home and a nice cool drink whilst reflecting on what we had seen. I am already looking forward to our next meet-up, hoping it won't be too long.

Margaret and Ian: thank you, Adrian, for your tireless work on introducing the beauty and joys of heathland (amongst other habitat) to the next generations of nature lovers.



A bad year for butterflies

Roger Hewitt: I expect you have all read in the press how bad 2024 was for butterflies/ Well, it was not a good year in our parish either. Every year some butterflies hatch out in good weather and do well. Some catch the bad weather and struggle, but somehow they all seem to balance out over the following couple of years.

I say this every year - no habitat is managed for butterflies specifically in our parish. It's either over-grazed or left and overgrown neither any good for butterflies. The Small Tortoiseshell is really in trouble. It has gone downhill the last couple of years and I can only remember seeing four this year on my walks.

The Brimstone was okay, the Red Admiral was down. The Peacock was down, although the Speckled Wood was okay and the Orange-tip just about okay.

The Green-veined White, Small White and Large White were all down until a large influx of migrants came in at Portland on the 8th September. All the fields at Portland Bill were full of white butterflies - great to see.

The Holly Blue was down but okay. The Wall Brown is always a bit scarce. Painted Ladies were low in numbers this year. The Grizzled Skipper is always low in numbers.

The Brown Argus was low, but I did find a couple of new sites. The Common Blue had a poor year, while the Meadow Brown was numerous, but down overall.

The Small Heath was okay, as was the Silver-studded Blue. The Green Hairstreak was very poor. The Small Copper was okay but down a bit on previous years.

The Large Skipper was down a little, while the Ringlet had a poor year. The Marbled White, Comma and Grayling did OK. The Gatekeeper was down compared to previous years. The Small Skipper was okay while the Silverwashed Fritillary was down a little.

The Essex Skipper is always hard to find, but I did observe a few. The Purple Hairstreak was okay – up in the trees.

I never did see a Clouded Yellow, Dingy Skipper or White Admiral this summer. However, I had a Dark Green Fritillary fly past me at Rogers Hill Farm on their new wild flower field. I must find time to look more next year.

I would like to thank you Margaret and Ian for all the work put into the newsletters over the years. You and the newsletters will be missed. Enjoy your travels.

Swan Excitement

Cynthia Read: Last Monday we had a bit of excitement. A young swan ended up in our garden. We have wild bit fenced off at the top, and we think on the Sunday evening when it was very windy the swan got blown into the trees and crash landed. It was quite annoyed!

It took me nearly 3 hours to get help for it. I eventually rang Abbotsbury Swannery and they located a swan rescuer. We had to keep it penned in the top of the garden, as there was no way it could have flown out as it was favouring one wing. Eventually it was rescued and put in a straitjacket - much to its disgust!

What made all the more hectic we were having big job done in the garden!

So a somewhat chaotic day to say the least!



https://abbotsburyswannery.co.uk/

Why do some Swans belong to the Monarch?

There are many curious traditions associated with the monarchy of the United Kingdom. One of the most well-known is that all swans are the property of the

King. Killing a swan, some claim, is high treason which could see you thrown in the Tower. However, this is not strictly correct; it is only unmarked mute swans that are the property of the Crown, and you won't you end up in the Tower for killing one. In fact, the actual truth is far more interesting.

For hundreds of years, swans were seen as a prized food, often served as the centrepiece at feasts and banquets, skinned and redressed, with a lump of burning coal in its beak. They were particularly popular with noblemen and royalty. In 1247, for example, Henry III ordered 40 swans for the Christmas celebrations at Winchester.

Unlike chickens, geese, and ducks, though, swans could never be fully domesticated. Historical records show that they were semi-domesticated in England by at least the 12th century, probably by pinioning, but that they still retained many traits of fully wild animals such as a high degree of territoriality and only flocking out of breeding season.

This meant that swans could not be kept in the usual manner of domestic animals, so unless you owned a large private lake or moat, they had to live on open water, free to swim wherever they fancied. And once they move onto common land, you may lose ownership of them.

It is not known when it became customary for swans to be considered Royal Fowl, that is property of the Crown, but records documenting the rules of ownership go back to the middle of the 12th century, with the first written record of royal swan ownership dating back to 1186. In 1246 it is known that the Sergeant of Kennington was seizing cygnets on behalf of the King, and by 1361 the Crown had employed a Master of the King's Game of Swans, also known as the Royal Swan-herd, Royal Swannerd, or Royal Swan-master.

Killing or injuring swans, stealing eggs, hunting near them with dogs, driving them from your land, or even cutting the grass near a swan were all considered offences and by 1463 a Swan-Mote was put in place by the monarch, with commissioners and justices appointed to hear the cases.

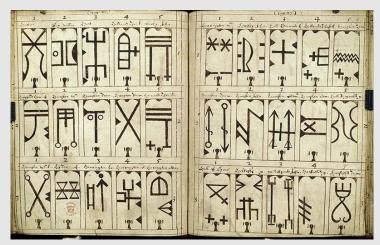
By the beginning of the 15th century however, wealthy people were awarded the right to buy, sell, and eat swans, by purchasing a 'swan mark' from the

King. As proof of ownership a mark, one of the oldest property marks in England, was carved into the swan's beak.

Over the centuries, hundreds of different swan marks evolved, with books, such as The Cantley Swan Roll. published to keep track of them. At first, the marks consisted of simple lines and shapes but eventually swords, crossbows, heraldic symbols, and finally letters were used.

Complex rules surrounding ownership were also drawn up and each year families of swans were rounded up to determine who the cygnets, which were highly sought after for their meat, belonged to.

If the cygnets had parents that belonged to two different owners, the brood was shared among them with the owner of the male swan, the cob, picking the first bird. If there was an odd number of cygnets, the owner of the cob, was given the extra cygnet. Alternatively, owners could pay to acquire disputed birds, or if there were 3 cygnets, the person whose land the nest was built on may be entitled to claim one of them.



Collection of swan-marks displayed in alphabetical order, beginning with the royal swan mark before Henry VIII – from the Harley Collection in the British Library

Any swans and cygnets that were left unmarked remained the property of the Crown. Some of the marked birds were released to maintain the breeding stocks, while the rest were taken away to be fattened up on grain.

The custom was solely a peculiarity to England and Wales. In Scotland no such system developed, and the swan was never considered a royal bird.

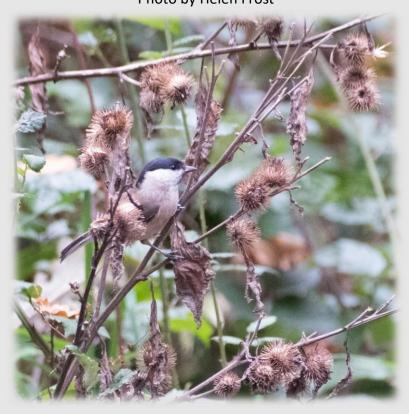
As domestic poultry became more widely available, swan meat fell out of favour, and the birds lost their value. The owners let their licences lapse, and no longer marked their birds, with very few retaining their right to own swans. In the 19th century the practice finally stopped when Queen Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII, decided it caused the swans unnecessary suffering.

Today, just 3 bodies have kept their right to own swans. Two livery companies, the Vintners and the Dyers, and the Ilchester family, which owns the swans breeding at a colony in Abbotsbury in Dorset. The Abbotsbury swannery has been in existence since at least the middle of the 14th century, while the livery companies received their rights in the 15th century.

When Queen Elizabeth II died, the ownership of the swans passed immediately to King Charles III. And although officially he owns all unmarked swans, he only exercises his right over parts of the River Thames and its tributaries.

https://www.birdspot.co.uk/bird-brain/why-do-swans-belong-to-the-monarch

Marsh Tit on the track towards Snelling Farm near Moreton
Photo by Helen Frost



Grey Heron visiting an Affpuddle garden pond

Photo taken through a window by Adrian Middleton

Adrian Middleton: It is the first time in decades that I have seen a heron in my garden



Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
Campbell De Burgh, Briantspuddle Community Website
Margaret Cheetham, Editor

In Memory of Tasie Russell

Who helped set up and deliver this newsletter more than 20 years ago. Her memorial service is at Affpuddle Church on 9 November at 2pm