



No. 201

1 January – 31 March 2011

Editorial Panel: Helen Ikin, Steve Woodward, Jim Graham.

Hon. Sec. Judy Johnson, 27 Sandalwood Road, Loughborough, Leics. LE11 3PR (01509-214711)

ORCHIDS AND RARE PLANTS OF HERBERT'S MEADOW

One of the wildlife spectacles of Charnwood Forest is surely Herbert's Meadow at orchid-time, early June. As we might expect in a semi-natural habitat, the abundance of orchids varies from year to year - 2011 seems to be a very good year indeed. Five species have been recorded at the site but one, the Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio*, has not been seen since 1974. The two most abundant are the Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and the Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* ssp. *ericetorum*. There must now be thousands of each. In both species the leaves are generally spotted

and the flower colour ranges from white to deep pink, though the Heath-spotted has a tendency to be white in our local populations. The petals are usually marked with pink streaks and dots, but what distinguishes the two species is not the colour or markings, but the shape of the lower petal, or lip. Common-spotted has three lobes of more-or-less equal size; whereas Heath Spotted has a middle lobe that is distinctly smaller than the side lobes. It is not unusual to find intermediate specimens – some of which may be genuine hybrids.

I know of two plants of Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*, the first of which appeared in 1998, flowering again in 2001, 2007 and 2008. The second was recorded only in 2008, when the flowering spike was eaten. The meadow is usually grazed by cattle and it is inevitable that some plants, including rare ones, will be consumed, but most meadow plants are perennials so they will have more opportunities to flower and set seed. Without grazing, of course, the meadow would soon become overgrown and would lose its rare species, most of which are small and intolerant of shade. Every few years, the cattle are excluded and a hay-crop is taken.

The most significant orchid species, from the nature conservation point of view, is the Marsh Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia densiflora*, as it occurs nowhere else in the county. Indeed, it is rather thinly distributed nationally. Until the recent split,

IN THIS EDITION

CLASSIFIED RECORDS

- Mammals Page 3
- Birds Page 4
- Reptiles and Amphibians Page 9
- Fish Page 10
- Butterflies Page 12
- Moths Page 13
- Other Insects Page 15
- Flowering Plants & Ferns Page 17
- Other Records Page 18
- Weather Page 18
- Acknowledgements Page 19

this species and two others were all known as Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*. The flowering spikes are narrow, the colour is less variable – most often deep rose-pink or mauve, but occasionally white. The flowers have no spots or streaks and, of course, they are fragrant. A good character for separating them from *Dactylorhiza* is the long, thin spur, which contains nectar accessible only to long-tongued insects such as moths. In 1991 there were less than ten spikes in one small area. There was a risk that a hungry cow or rabbit would devour them all in seconds, so for a few years they were protected by a small wire enclosure. Through the 1990s, the population grew dramatically to well over 100 spikes, spreading over most of the meadow. In 2011, Michael Jeeves estimated that there were 375 spikes. They seem poised to move into the adjacent field (compartment 19a), which has been managed in the same way since 1986.

Herbert's Meadow (SK494133) became part of Ulverscroft Nature Reserve (compartment 18a, 2.00 hectares) when it was purchased by the Wildlife Trust in 1981. The variety of wild flowers in this small area is remarkable, particularly if the grasses and sedges are included. My records show that about 185 vascular plant taxa have been recorded (that includes the trees, shrubs and hedgerow plants). The richness reflects the variety of soil conditions – dry in the centre, and slightly acidic towards the top (pH 5.5, see Primavesi & Evans, 1988, Habitat Study 27); and marshy around the margins where spring water seeps through (up

to pH 7.6). Very few rare plants have been lost since detailed recording began: in addition to those mentioned elsewhere in this article, the following were last seen in the 1970s: Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*.

Twenty-five species of grass grow in the meadow, along with 15 of sedges. Of the grasses, only one, Heath Grass *Danthonia decumbens*, can be regarded as rare. The sedges, on the other hand, include several rarities. A sixteenth sedge, Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, disappeared in the 1960s, but most of the others are doing well. Of the sedges listed in the *Leicestershire and Rutland Rare Plant Register* (Jeeves, 2007), Wood Club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus* and Star Sedge *Carex echinata* have both increased in the last ten years. Tawny Sedge *Carex hostiana* is difficult to spot and the last successful search was in 2009. I have not recorded Common Yellow-sedge *Carex viridula* ssp. *oedocarpa* since 1992, but it does still grow in its more typical wet heath habitat elsewhere on the reserve. Flea Sedge, *Carex pulicaris*, cannot be seen anywhere else in Leicestershire. It has responded well to conservation management and is certainly more abundant than it was 20 years ago. It is very small, but its dark brown fruits, which point down at an acute angle to the stem, are distinctive. When ripe, they jump off when touched, like fleas. A recent colonist is Spring Sedge, *Carex caryophyllea*. It



was unrecorded before 2005, whereas now its pale yellow male flowering spikes are conspicuous from a distance early in the season! A large sedge at the bottom of the meadow was originally recorded as Lesser Pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*. I noticed that these plants were not forming good fruits, so I wondered if it was a hybrid. Michael Foley and Michael Porter confirmed that the colony was actually a hybrid between *C. acutiformis* and *C. riparia* (Greater Pond-sedge). It now has a lonely spot on the national distribution map in Jermy, *et. al.* (2007). Unlike animal hybrids, which generally come to nothing, plant hybrids do have the potential to become new species (Stace, 1975).

Returning to more colourful plants, few can match the beauty of the Sherard's Downy Rose *Rosa sherardii*, whose deep pink flowers adorn the western boundary hedge in late May. This shrub has downy leaflets (which look greyish) and glandular pedicels. The sepals are pinnate and spreading. The wettest parts of the meadow are favoured by Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*. Its flowers are arranged in umbels and the upper leaves are pinnate – so the plant could be mistaken for an umbellifer. In bud, the flowers are pale pink, becoming almost white when they open in early May. Male and female flowers are on separate plants, which look rather different, the female flowers and heads being smaller and more densely packed. Imperforate St. John's-wort *Hypericum maculatum* produces large, bright yellow star-shaped flowers between June and August, in the south-west corner of the meadow. Like the



Sherard's Downy Rose
© Steve Woodward

Square-stemmed John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum*, which also grows in the meadow, the stem is four-angled, but the petals of Imperforate St. John's-wort are at least twice as long as the sepals.

The flora of the meadow has been well-studied and it is reassuring that 96% of all taxa ever recorded are still there and that most of the losses occurred before the site was a nature reserve. The Wildlife Trust should be congratulated for purchasing the meadow in the first place and looking after it so effectively.

Stephen Woodward

References

- Jeeves, M. (2007) *Leicestershire and Rutland Rare Plant Register*. LRWT.
 Jermy, A.C., Simpson, D.A., Foley, M.J.Y. and Porter, M.S. (2007) *Sedges of the British Isles*. BSBI.
 Primavesi, A.L. & Evans, P.A. (1988) *Flora of Leicestershire*. LMARS.
 Stace, C.A. (1975) *Hybridization and the flora of the British Isles*. Academic Press.

CLASSIFIED RECORDS

MAMMALS

Fifteen members braved the cold weather and sent in records for 13 species.

Mole activity was noted by three members at Grace Dieu, Swithland and Buddon Brook Meadows in Quorn.

The only **Common Shrew** recorded was from C & JaG's Holwell garden.

Bats were noted in Quorn in early and mid-March and on 30th March when CD picked up Pipistrelles at 45 kHz on his bat detector.

Rabbits were seen in Buddon Brook Meadows, Grace Dieu, Bradgate Park, Cranoe, Swithland, Lount NR, Great Central Way in Leicester – a baby rabbit on 19 March,

PHG reported seeing no **Brown Hares** at Eye Brook Reservoir despite careful searching in the fields where they can usually be seen in numbers. However, PH has seen them in good numbers in fields near Ratcliffe where he reports

a very healthy population. DP saw the local Beagle pack put up two hares near Tilton as well as a fox! On 25 March SFW & HI watched a solitary hare behaving very strangely in a field near Bradgate, it was moving very slowly and appeared unwell.

HB reports **Grey Squirrels** as common in the urban areas of the city this quarter. They were also noted in Shepshed, Grace Dieu, Ulverscroft, Birstall and Loughborough, often visiting bird feeders or searching for food previously buried.

SFW disturbed a **Wood Mouse** in a birch stump at Ulverscroft NR on 15 January and DP had them at the bird feeders in his Swithland garden while in JH's Loughborough greenhouse they were consuming the pips from various fruits.

A **Brown Rat** looked GP in the eye before running under a shed on the Meadow Lane allotments in Birstall on 2 February.

A **Red Fox** visits a Loughborough garden nightly for bones etc. and ATO saw one in central Loughborough on 30 March. HI & SFW finally saw a Fox at Grace Dieu where they have had lots of signs over the last three years but never actually seen one. It was curled up asleep in the sun on some rocks. GP had a Fox at Birstall on 10 February and DP reports frequent sightings in his Swithland garden, one even leaving droppings on top of the box hedging. A Nanpantan resident had his garden shoes picked up and moved around the garden by a Fox. The only road casualty reported was at Roecliffe.

Stoat records came from JK who watched one walking along the foot of a wall in Lower Beacon car park on 12 March and DP who saw one crossing the road between Field Head and Newtown Linford in the afternoon of 10 March.

We have a lone **American Mink** sighting by SFW when one ran across the road near the weir at Groby Pool and passed within two metres of him. This is the first time he has seen a Mink at Groby Pool.

Signs of **Badgers** were noted at Rough Hill, Ulverscroft and Grace Dieu and in Swithland and Quorn there was extensive damage to lawns. PHG's Badgers get into his garden over a wall so he must have some very tasty morsels buried in his lawn. A live Badger was seen at Birstall and

road casualties recorded at Earl Shilton and Joe Moore's Lane at Woodhouse Eaves.

A **Muntjac** was crossing Whitcroft's Lane, Ulverscroft at 11 am on 26 January and another was spotted browsing in a garden in Mountsorrel in March. Also in March singles were seen at Groby Pool and Ulverscroft NR and good footprints were noted at Ulverscroft NR in February.

Helen Ikin

BIRDS

With most of the larger waters frozen for long periods during the quarter, double-figure counts of **Mute Swans** came from just three sites with Swithland Reservoir holding the highest numbers, peaking at 47 on the last day of January.

As usual, the Soar Valley area was the place for wintering geese. A single **Pink-footed Goose** was at Wanlip North Lakes on 30 January whilst a first-winter **White-fronted Goose** was at Swithland Reservoir on 16 and 17 January. The only three-figure count of **Greylag Geese** was 246 around the Fosse Way Quarry in Syston on 16 March accompanied by some 34 hybrid geese. The largest flock of **Canada Geese** was 61 at Dishley Pool on 16 January with double-figure counts coming from a further three sites and pairs were in evidence by the end of the quarter looking for suitable breeding sites. A single **Snow Goose** of unknown origin was at Cossington Meadows on 27 March and an **Egyptian Goose** flew over Swithland Reservoir on 10 February.

A pair of **Shelduck** first located at Cropston Reservoir on 16 February, was still in the boathouse area until the end of the quarter. Singles were seen at Cossington Meadows on 9 March and Watermead CP North on the 18th. **Mandarin Duck** were at four sites with double-figure counts coming from Swithland Reservoir, peaking at 16 on 22 January. Pairs were noted at most sites towards the end of the quarter. Three-figure counts of wintering **Wigeon** were at four sites with January producing the highest counts of c600 at Swithland Reservoir, 473 at Raynsway Lake, Syston and c300 at Watermead CP North. The long-staying, rather tame male was still in the Bradgate Park/Cropston Reservoir area at the end of the quarter whilst a hybrid

American Wigeon x Wigeon male was at Cossington Meadows on 9 March. **Gadwall** were noted on nine waters, with three-figure counts occurring at just two of these, where maxima were 151 at Swithland Reservoir on 29 January and 103 at Raynsway Lake, Syston on the 12th. Double-figure counts were noted at a further



Teal © Jim Graham

three sites. The only counts of **Teal** in excess of 100 were at Swithland Reservoir with 115 on 5 January and Birstall Meadows where 106 were noted on the 19th; counts in excess of 50 came from Cropston Reservoir and Cossington Meadows in January and February respectively. The 'big freeze' was obviously having an effect on waterfowl numbers as only Cropston Reservoir had a three-figure count of **Mallard** (eight sites in 2010) when 103 were there on 24 January. Blackbrook and Swithland Reservoirs along with Dishley Pool had double-figure counts during the first two months. A pair of **Pintail** was at Birstall Meadows on 18 January. Double-figure counts of **Shoveler** were at five waters but only Watermead CP Birstall had in excess of 15 with c40 there on 2 March. Double-figure flocks of **Pochard** came from four sites with two having numbers in excess of 30 with maxima being 80 at Groby Pool on 12 February and 40 at Wanlip North Lakes on New Year's Day. Small numbers of **Red-crested Pochard** were at Swithland Reservoir between 16 and 29 January peaking at three males and four females on the 24th, whilst three males and two females were at Groby Pool on 12 February. Flocks of **Tufted Duck** in excess of 100 came from three sites where maxima were 355 at Swithland Reservoir on 22 January, 140 at Cropston Reservoir two days later and 119 at Trent Valley Pits on 3 February. A female **Scaup**, present on the River

Soar on 1 January, was the only record for the quarter. **Goldeneye** were recorded at just three waters with the main assembly at Swithland Reservoir where the maximum count noted was 112 on 19 March with single figures at Cropston Reservoir and Dishley Pool. Other than a female on the River Soar near Wanlip on 1 January, all **Smew** records came from Swithland Reservoir where up to four (two males and two females) were seen regularly from the start of the year until 27 March. Most records of **Goosander** were noted in the Soar Valley area with the highest count being 21 at Watermead CP North on 11 January. Away from this region, what was probably the same lone male was found at Albert Village Lake and Normanton-le-Heath on 9 and 12 February respectively.

Small numbers of **Red-legged Partridge** were at nine sites with double-figure counts from Oakthorpe and Branston, Melton, whilst the increasingly rare **Grey Partridges** were at just three sites.

Little Grebes were noted at just six sites with none holding more than two birds and double-figure counts of **Great Crested Grebe** came from just three sites with 48 at Cropston Reservoir on 27 March the highest. Pairs displaying and nest building were noted from four sites from 13 February.

Double-figure counts of **Cormorants** came from three locations where maxima were 35 at Cropston Reservoir on 29 January, ten at Watermead CP Birstall on 2 March and 43 at Groby Pool on the 7th; nests were being repaired at the latter site from 12 February.

Up to three **Bitterns** were present in the north section of Watermead CP during the first two weeks of January whilst one was seen circling over the dam at Swithland Reservoir at dusk on the 5th. **Little Egrets** were at seven sites mainly in one and twos with up to four at both Swithland Reservoir during January and Watermead CP Birstall in March. Small numbers of **Grey Heron** came from seven sites and by 5 March birds were occupying nests at Groby Pool. A new site for nesting birds was located at Charnwood Water, Loughborough where a pair was seen to be nesting on the island on the 3rd.

Red Kite records occurred in all three months of the quarter mainly in the north and

east of the region with two at both Edmondthorpe in January and Holwell in February. Also from the east of the region was a report of a **Hen Harrier** at Eaton on 5 March. Single **Sparrowhawk** were at 13 sites including two gardens. The now ubiquitous **Buzzard** was encountered at 31 widespread locations mainly in ones and twos but nine were at both Albert Village Lake on 2 March and Swithland Reservoir on the 13th and 27th. Counts of more than two came from a further nine sites whilst display was noted at seven from mid-February. The only **Osprey** in the area during the period was over Cossington Meadows on 28 March – exactly the same date as in 2010. Records of **Kestrel** came from just eight locations, in stark contrast to both Sparrowhawk and Buzzard sightings. **Peregrines** were noted at ten sites with pairs observed at three of these.

Water Rails were located at just three sites; after three were at Watermead CP North in January, singles were at Cossington Meadows and Dishley Pool in March. The harsh weather was obviously pushing some species away from their usual locations as there were no double-figure counts of **Moorhen** and records came from just five sites, the highest count being nine at Cropston Reservoir on 13 March. Likewise, numbers of **Coot** were well down on expectations with just two sites having double-figure counts the highest being 44 at Dishley Pool on 16 January. This compares to 294 at Watermead CP North on 17 January 2010.

Oystercatcher were located at six sites from 16 February with pairs at five showing potential breeding including up to three pairs around Cossington Meadows. The first record of returning **Little Ringed Plover** for the season and the only one for the quarter was of four at Cossington Meadows on 27 March. The low water level at Cropston Reservoir was enticing for two **Ringed Plover** that were around from 23 March onwards. The best count of **Lapwing** was 130 at Watermead CP North on 9 February and the only other count in excess of 100 came from nearby at Cossington Meadows the following week. Display or breeding activity was noted at four areas. Two **Snipe** at Bishop Meadow, Loughborough on 16 January had reduced to one by 12 February whilst a single was at Cropston Reservoir on 25 March. **Woodcock**

were located at four sites with two at Grace Dieu on 7 March and Ulverscroft NR on the 1st whilst a **Black-tailed Godwit** was at Cossington Meadows on the 27th. A single **Curlew** was noted at Cossington South Lakes on 1 January with three at Swithland Reservoir four days later. One flew over Cossington Meadows on 9 March. There were just two records of wintering **Green Sandpiper** with one on the River Soar near Wanlip on 1 January and two at Lockington GP on 11 February. All **Redshank** records occurred during March with the first at Cropston Reservoir on the 12th. Three were at Watermead CP North on the 18th whilst six were at Cossington Meadows and one at Albert Village Lake both on the 30th.

As in 2010, there was a reluctance for members to record gulls and we are grateful for the efforts of one individual for most of this quarter's records. At least 5,000 **Black-headed Gull** were coming into Cropston Reservoir at dusk on 30 January and 3,000 were roosting at Swithland Reservoir on the 15th. The only other site with a four-figure count was Albert Village Lake where 2,500 were present on the 26th whilst two other sites had counts in excess of 100. A first-winter **Mediterranean Gull** was in the roost at Cropston Reservoir on 21 February and up to three adults were present at Albert Village between 2 and 9 March. **Common Gull** were reported from just four sites with 360 at Swithland Reservoir on 2 March the highest count followed by 310 at Cropston Reservoir on 21 February. Other than 17 in the roost at Cropston Reservoir on 21 February, the only other counts of **Lesser Black-backed Gull** came from Albert Village Lake where three-figures were achieved in every month peaking at 850 on 23 February. **Herring Gull** also achieved monthly three-figure counts here and peaked at 300 on the same day. At least seven different **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at this location through the quarter comprising of three adults, one first-winter, two second-winter and one third-winter individuals and were accompanied by up to four **Caspian Gulls** comprising of two adults, a second-winter and a third-winter. A third-winter **Glaucous Gull** was also present between 13 January and 2 March, whilst a first-winter **Iceland Gull** was there from 9 March until at least the end of the quarter. Counts in excess of 50 **Great Black-backed Gull** were

achieved here in all three months and peaked at 110 on 23 February but reduced to just ten by the end of March.

Most **Stock Dove** records were of one or two but feeding flocks of 31 and 30 were noted at Branston, Melton and Lockington Marshes respectively and by the end of March at least three pairs were already nesting in areas within Bradgate Park. Four-figure counts of **Wood Pigeon** came from four sites with maxima being 2,200 at Swithland Reservoir, 1,700 at Cotes, 1,523 at Measham and 1,450 at Sweptstone; counts in excess of 500 came from a further four. Double-figure counts of **Collared Dove** came from just two sites 21 at Measham on 22 February and ten at South Croxton on 20 March.



Little Owl © Jim Graham

The only **Barn Owls** reported were up to two seen during February and March at Bradgate Park. This was also the most likely area to encounter **Little Owl** with records in all three months with at least four different birds involved. In addition, singles were at Normanton-le-Heath, Bottesford and in a Cropston garden whilst two were noted at Frolesworth. Reports of **Tawny Owl** came from six sites with most records involving calling birds with pairs duetting at Ulverscroft NR and Cropston.

It seems that the severe weather has had a dramatic effect on our **Kingfishers** as just one record was received – two were at Dishley Pool on 13 March. Reports of **Green Woodpeckers** came from 13 widespread sites with the highest count being three at both Bradgate Park and Measham. **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** were even more widespread with 24 sites involved including three gardens; drumming birds were reported from six sites. Despite **Lesser Spotted**

Woodpecker suffering losses in recent years, encouragingly there were reports from four areas all in March: Swithland Wood, Swithland Reservoir, Buddon Brook Meadows and Groby Pool.

No significant wintering flocks of **Sky Lark** were noted but records of singing or display came from 12 sites where the highest counts were 11 at Sweptstone on 12 February and ten at Griffydham on the 25th.

The first **Sand Martin** arrived in the area on 19 March when one was noted at Cropston Reservoir. Numbers slowly built up towards the end of the month and 60 were seen at Cossington Meadows on the 30th. **Swallows** did not arrive until the last few days of the quarter when two were seen at both Cossington Meadows and Swithland Reservoir on the 27th.

The only double-figure count of **Meadow Pipit** came from Stathern when 30 were recorded on 21 February. A **Rock Pipit** was on the dam at Swithland Reservoir between 4 and 6 March.

The freezing weather was also having an effect on **Grey Wagtail** as records came from just five sites with pairs noted regularly at Cropston Reservoir during March, with another pair at Buddon Brook. Noted more for its large numbers of gulls, Albert Village Lake also held the highest count of **Pied Wagtail**, with up to 115 being present in a pre-roost gathering on 9 February. The only other double-figure count came from Asfordby when 50 were at the sewage works on 31 January whilst an early migrant male **White Wagtail** was located at the inflow of Cropston Reservoir on 28 March.

Following on from an exceptional 2010 December, good numbers of **Waxwings** were still around the area although flocks were quite mobile, with double-figure counts from at least five locations.

Surprisingly, no wintering **Stonechat** records were received, another species that is suffering in recent years and may have been pushed further south to warmer climes during the bad weather.

Whilst **Wren** were only seen in ones and twos, there were four double-figure counts of **Dunnock** on BTO Atlas tetrads in February with

17 at Griffydam, 13 at Swepstone, 12 at Measham and ten at Normanton-le-Heath. Likewise double-figure counts of **Robins** came from the same four tetrads being 23, 19, 27 and 21 respectively plus 16 at Lount. The first **Wheatear** of the spring was a male at Bradgate Park on 25 March with a female at Beacon Hill three days later.

Double-figure counts of **Blackbird** came from six locations the highest count being 30 around Swepstone on 12 February. The largest flock of **Fieldfare** was 250 at Holwell on 23 January. There were counts in excess of 100 from a further five sites and double-figure counts from 15 more. As seems to be normal, there were smaller numbers of **Redwing** with a total of 125 in two flocks south of Loughborough on 2 January the largest count. The only other three-figure counts were 111 at Measham on 22 February and 100 at Mountsorrel on the 2nd although double-figure counts came from seven other areas. **Song Thrushes** were at 15 sites mainly in one or twos whilst records of one or two **Mistle Thrush** came from 14 with song noted at nine of these.

Singing **Cetti's Warblers** were heard in all three months at Watermead CP with at least two there in February. Wintering **Blackcaps** were reported from six sites through the quarter including three gardens. The first in song was noted at Grace Dieu towards the end of March. All records of **Chiffchaff** were reported in the second half of March with the first being birds in song at both Baggrave Hall and Swithland Reservoir on the 20th, the latter site holding six singing males on the 27th.

Records of **Goldcrests** came from nine sites mainly one or two but 16 were found at both Benscliffe Wood on 30 January (including a single flock of 11) and Lea Wood on 18 February. Song was heard at four sites including two birds at Cropston Reservoir on 16 January. **Long-tailed Tits** were widely recorded from 33 sites with double-figure counts coming from seven the highest being 12 at Benscliffe Wood on New Year's Day. A pair was seen to be building a nest at Ravenstone on 13 February, thereafter wintering flocks began to disperse and pairs or nesting activity was noted at a further 16 sites. The best count of **Blue Tit** came from Lount during a BTO Atlas visit when 38 were seen on

26 February although double-figure counts came from eight of the 21 sites noted. **Great Tits** were reported from 18 sites, seven of which held double-figure counts the highest again being on a BTO Atlas visit this time at Swepstone on 12 February when 30 were seen. Small numbers of **Coal Tit** were recorded at 17 sites but 16 were found at Benscliffe Wood on 30 January. The first indication of song was reported on 18 February from Lea Woods and thereafter from a further seven sites. There were few records of **Marsh Tit** with nine sites having one or two birds with song being noted at Grace Dieu and Charnwood Lodge on 19 March and Baggrave Hall the following day. **Willow Tit** continue to struggle and were recorded at just three sites although two pairs were noted near Lount on 26 February. The small party of five **Bearded Tit** that were present at Cossington Meadows from mid-November 2010 were still there on 1 January although numbers reduced through the weeks until the last record of one on 24 February.

One or two **Nuthatch** were at 19 sites with four at Kaye's Plantation, Quorn on 7 March the highest count. One or two **Treecreeper** were at 16 sites with one was already in full song on 12 January at Watermead CP North and at a further four locations by the end of the quarter.

Small numbers of **Jay** were at ten sites whilst **Magpies** were also at ten including 19 birds around both Measham on 22 February and Griffydam three days later. The largest count of **Jackdaw** was 1,220 going into a roost at Watermead CP North on 31 January with three-figure counts coming from three other sites. Several pairs were noted at nest holes in Bradgate Park on 25 March. **Rookery** counts came from five locations with double-figure occupied nests at three of these: 52 at Eastwell church, 51 at Sproxton church and 44 at Baggrave Park. The largest count of **Carriion Crow** was at Swithland Reservoir on 5 January when 110 were in a pre-roost gathering on the ice. Flocks of over 20 came from a further four sites. One or two **Raven** were noted at 13 widespread sites with four at Grace Dieu on 21 March. Less well recorded were **Starling**, found at just 12 sites with three-figure flocks noted in three during February: 208 at Lount and 115 at both Measham and Normanton-le-Heath all during February.

Few records were received for **House Sparrow** and the only count of significance was 40 at Normanton-le-Heath in February with counts in excess of 20 at a further three. Twenty **Tree Sparrows** were noted at Shackerstone on 19 January whilst 12 at Normanton-le-Heath on 13 February was the only other double-figure count from eight sites.

Small numbers of **Chaffinch** were noted at 15 sites with counts over 30 at six. The poor **Brambling** winter continued; other than seven at Lea Wood on 30 January, all other sightings were of singles from seven further sites. The last of the quarter was a male in PHG's Quorn garden on 24 March. There were no significant counts of **Greenfinch**, which were recorded from just eight locations. By far the largest count of **Goldfinches** was 156 at Swebstone on 12 February. The only other count in excess of 50 came from Bradgate Park with 60 there on 25 January with other double-figure counts coming from seven of the 13 sites.

The largest flock of **Siskin** was of 80 found at Bradgate Park on 17 January with 50 at Watermead CP Birstall on 2 March the only other significant count. A wintering flock of 250 **Linnet** at Edmondthorpe on 4 January gradually increased to 550 by the 21st. The only other three-figure count from nine sites was 100 near Sheet Hedges Wood on 17 March. Of the six localities where **Lesser Redpoll** were recorded, three were member's gardens with 30 in MM's Loughborough garden on 27 January the best count. Away from gardens, by far the highest count was 72 strangely, feeding in leaf-litter at Cropston Reservoir on 13 February. Three **Common Redpoll** were at Albert Village Lake on 2 February whilst one was in a Cropston garden



Reed Bunting © Jim Graham

on 15 March. The only record for **Crossbill** was four feeding in Larches at Benscliffe Wood on 7 March. Small numbers of **Bullfinch** were noted at 18 widespread sites throughout the quarter with eight at Normanton-le-Heath on 13 February the largest count. There was just one three-figure count of **Yellowhammer** for the quarter when 150 were noted at Cranoe on 22 January. Counts over 20 came from a further four. Small numbers of **Reed Bunting** were noted at 11 sites with just two double-figure counts, 14 at Harston on 21 March and 12 at Swithland Reservoir going to roost on 6 January.

Thanks again to Ken Goodrich for compiling and sending us the LNC Member's bird records from the LROS database.

Jim Graham

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

It is not unusual for sightings of reptiles to be few and far between for this quarter, and this time we have only two sightings!

Adder *Vipera berus berus*

SFW reports that after three hours of searching along the north wall at Bradgate Park, on 28 March, he managed to find a single specimen.

Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*

Three days earlier, on 25 March, also in Bradgate Park, HI and SFW came across two rather shy specimens of the Common Lizard, peeping out from a stone wall.

On the other hand, we do have plenty of sightings for amphibians, including one or two sightings of our somewhat elusive friends the Newts!

Common Newt *Triturus vulgaris vulgaris*

GP reports finding a male, with bright orange underparts, crossing Nether Hall Lane, late at night on 31 March. We also have a report from HS of a female newt of undetermined species, in a garden pond in Chaveney Road, in Quorn, on the 6 and 7 March.

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*

This quarter we have only one sighting for this amphibian, and this comes from GP who reports a sighting of three specimens on 11 March, which were disturbed during the uprooting of

herbaceous *Symphytum* at Plot 1 on the Meadow Lane Allotments at Birstall.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*

Perhaps not surprisingly, we have quite a number of sightings for this amphibian during this quarter, with a considerable amount of spawning activity being observed. Our earliest report comes from HI and SFW who found four clumps of spawn on 10 March near Old John in Bradgate Park. They also report finding further quantities of spawn later in the month, on 25 March, at the Round Pond and near the ruins, in Bradgate Park. SFW also reports visiting the Ulverscroft NR on 24 March and finding numbers of frogs on Ponds 2 and 3, especially on Pond 3, with spawn in Pond 2. SFW also reports finding spawn at Grace Dieu Wood on 23 March.

Another early sighting is one reported by JK, who found at least 17 specimens, with clumps of spawn, at Wileman's Pond, on Beacon Hill on 12 March. JH reports finding frogs with spawn in a garden pond on Farndale Drive in Loughborough on 17 March, and on the same day PHG reports finding 12 clumps of spawn in a flooded corner of the old moat in the Buddon Brook Meadows at Quorn – a usual breeding site. He also records finding more spawn there on 25 March, but by this time the water level had dropped, leaving some of the spawn stranded on the water's edge. In his accompanying notes, PHG records that in his son-in-law's and daughter's garden pond, also in Quorn, spawn first appeared by the middle of the month, about a week earlier than last year, with tadpoles present by the end of the month. PHG also records that frogs could be heard croaking in the stream at the back of the Griffin Inn in Swithland on 20 March. As far as his own garden pond was concerned, in the centre of Quorn, PHG reports that frogs were present throughout the month of March, but – as is usually the case – they failed to breed in his garden pond. ATO reports seeing a small frog in his back garden on the 22 March, and C & JaG report that on the same day they found the season's first frogspawn in their garden at Holwell. HB reports that many Frogs could be heard croaking at Evington Park Pond, in Leicester, on 25 March, and that he found a small quantity of spawn in Victoria Park on 29 March.

As a postscript to this section on the Common Frog, PHG comments in his notes that the “usual carnage on our local roads did not seem to occur this year, probably because of a lack of warm, wet nights when this usually seems to happen”. Certainly, I did not see as many dead frogs on the road this year as I have in previous years, and – whatever the reason for this may be – this can only be regarded as a good thing for the frogs!

Tony Onions

Apologies to Tony Onions for missing him out of the list of Heritage writers in the leading article in Heritage 200.

FISH (including CRAYFISH)

In contrast with the section on Amphibians, we have very little in the way of fish sightings to report for this quarter.

Roach *Rutilus rutilus*, Tench *Tinca tinca*, and Minnow *Phoxinus phoxinus*

HB reports observing an angler catch several specimens of Roach and Tench at Bluebanks, at Glen Parva on 23 March. HB also reports seeing small shoals of Minnows at Willow Brook Park on 26 March.

Bullhead *Cottus gobio*

SFW reports finding two specimens of this fish at Grace Dieu on 13 January.

This concludes the reports for this section for the last quarter. However, at the time of writing (the beginning of June), the ponds in the Queen's Park in Loughborough have just received a donation of some new ornamental fish, and so it seems to me that it would not be amiss, at this point, to provide a few brief notes on these ornamental fish commonly stocked in garden ponds, and their origins.

Goldfish *Carassius auratus*

The Goldfish is, of course, our best known ornamental fish. It is a domesticated version of the so-called Gibel Carp, which was originally found in the Far East, and has been selectively bred in China for perhaps hundreds of years. It is thought that they were first brought to Portugal in 1611, and possibly to England in the same year. However, according to the Rev. W. Houghton, writing in 1879, we do know that a

large consignment of Goldfish was obtained in 1728 by Sir Matthew Decker, the then Lord Mayor of London, who presented them to his friends in various parts of the country. It appears that in parts of southern Europe Goldfish have established feral populations, and where this occurs the fish rapidly revert to their normal, brownish and silvery colouring. This is to be expected: any ornamental, orange-coloured fish is an obvious target for predators, whether from the air or within the water! Consequently, any Goldfish, which are turned loose into the wild, do not tend to survive for very long.

“Koi” Carp *Cyprinus carpio*

The so-called “Koi” Carp is quite simply a domesticated version of the Common Carp. Like the Goldfish, the Koi Carp is the product of years of selective breeding in the Far East, where some of the more unusually coloured, larger specimens are much sought after and can command very high prices. However, it is only in recent years that the keeping of “Koi” Carp has become fashionable here in England. These days, the fish are commonly bred in this country, rather than being imported from Japan, and this has led to a reduction in price. Occasionally a type of Koi known as the “Ghost Carp” is stocked in some of the commercial fisheries. Fortunately, (from the point of view of the fish!) because they grow to comparatively large sizes, they are less subject to predation than the smaller Goldfish.

Golden Tench *Tinca tinca*

Unlike the two preceding species, which are not native to these islands, and which are often unsuccessful in spawning in the wild in this country, there is every indication that the Tench is a native species. Like all of the species listed here, it is a Cyprinid – a member of the carp family, and although absent from the Scottish highlands and Norway, it is found throughout Europe eastwards to Siberia. The Tench is a powerfully built fish, with a square tail. The normal colour is an olive-brown or olive-green - with a tiny red eye. The size of the eye gives a clue to the habits of this fish: it is a fish of slow-moving or still waters, including shallow, weedy, muddy ponds. It dislikes the light, preferring to feed nocturnally, and bulldozes its way through the weed beds, using its sense of smell to detect the invertebrates upon which it feeds in the mud. In shallow waters, it becomes

dormant during the winter months. It is a common fish here in Leicestershire, particularly in canals, reservoirs and gravel pits. The Golden Tench is simply a gold or orange coloured version of the wild fish, often with irregular black blotches or spots. Its origins appear to be uncertain, but according to the Rev. W. Houghton (writing in 1879) it seems that the fish was first brought to this country in the 1860s from Germany.

Golden (or Blue) Orfe or Ide *Leuciscus idus*

This is the last in this list of exotic Cyprinids, but in some ways perhaps the most interesting. It is not native to the British Isles, although it is very much a northern European fish, and as the scientific name implies, it is closely related to two native fish: the Chub *Leuciscus cephalus* and the Dace *Leuciscus leuciscus*. The original range of this fish was from the Alps northwards, and from Germany eastwards, including Denmark and Sweden, all the way across Russia and most of Siberia. Like its close relative the Chub, and unlike the other fish in this list, the Orfe is happy to feed at low temperatures, although they prefer to retire to deep water during the worst of the northern Winter. It appears that the Orfe is essentially a river fish, preferring lowland rivers but migrating to shallower water in order to spawn. It will also live in brackish water. In its natural state, it resembles its close relatives, the Dace and more particularly the Chub. It is a powerfully built, (almost) cylindrical fish, with similar colouring to the Chub: that is to say, it has a dark back with silvery sides, fairly large scales, and the lower fins are pink or reddish, while the dorsal fin and tail are grey. However, there are some points of difference which can be readily seen even when the fish is in the water. Whilst the Chub is almost round in section, the Orfe has slightly flattened sides – almost as if it were a hybrid between a Chub and a Roach *Rutilus rutilus*. Compared with the Chub, the head and mouth are smaller, and most noticeably, the rear edge of the dorsal and anal fins is *concave*, whereas in the chub they are *convex*. It grows to a similar size to the Chub, namely, about 60 cm in length, for a weight of 4 kg. Young fish feed on invertebrates, but older, larger fish will also take small fish. One other important difference between the Orfe and the Chub is that the Chub is widely regarded as uneatable, whereas the Orfe is said to be quite

good eating, and has been fished for commercially, for the table, in parts of eastern Europe and Russia.

The “golden”, ornamental version of the Orfe can be any colour from a pinkish white through to a bright orange. In recent years, a new, bluish variant has become available; and all three variants - golden, blue and natural - are available in this country from garden centres and aquarium shops. As for when the Orfe first arrived in this country, I have no information. The Rev. W. Houghton does not mention the Orfe in his book on British freshwater fish, which suggests that the fish did not arrive here (probably from Germany?) until after 1879.

By a curious quirk of coincidence, in recent years fish breeders have succeeded in developing golden and blue versions of the Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss*. These are sometimes stocked in commercial fisheries, presumably to provide added interest. The reason I have not listed this fish under a separate heading is very simply that, in my opinion, the Rainbow Trout cannot really be considered to be a suitable fish for aquaria or garden ponds. The reason for this is that the Rainbow trout, like many other Salmonid fish, has very narrow tolerances in terms of water temperature and oxygen levels, which simply cannot be met in a typical garden pond. By contrast, Riehl and Baensch, in their well-known book “The Aquarium Atlas”, describe the Golden Orfe as “hardy and better suited to garden ponds than Goldfish”.

Finally, by way of conclusion, I would like to add that personally speaking I am not an enthusiast for brightly coloured, selectively bred fish: I much prefer the subtle colours and shades which occur naturally. However, I hope these notes will provide our readers with some insight into the history and biology of these ornamental fish species, which nevertheless hold a fascination all of their own.

Tony Onions

BUTTERFLIES

The consistently low temperatures this quarter resulted in very little activity amongst our butterflies until the middle of March when some

warm sunny weather was responsible for a sudden surge of activity.

Pieridae

A brief spell of warm, sunny weather in February resulted in active individuals of the **Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*** being seen at Norton-juxta Twycross, Little Orton and Scraftoft on the 24th and in March two males were observed in different parts of Quorn on the 14th. From this date until the end of March, this attractive and distinctive species was noted widely in over 25 localities with good numbers of both sexes being noted on the wing on the 19th, a lovely warm, sunny day.

The only **Large White *Pieris brassicae*** reported seen was one in a Holwell garden on 22 March and another at Thurnby on the 24th.

The **Small White *Pieris rapae*** was noted along the Barkby Thorpe Road on 21 March, at Regent Road, Leicester on the 23rd, at Quorn on the 25th and in a Barlestone garden on the 31st.

A very early male **Orange-tip *Authocharis cardamines*** was seen at Market Bosworth by FTS on 25 March.

Lycaenidae

A **Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*** was present visiting flowers in my Quorn garden on 25 March, another particularly early date for this species.

Nymphalidae

The first **Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*** reported seen out of hibernation were noted PH's Shepshed garden and by HB along the Great Central Way on 19 March and between then and the end of the month it was observed in a total of 19 localities, mostly in ones and twos, with a maximum of four at Shepshed and along Great Central Way, Leicester. Two were seen nectaring on Goat Willow at Beacon Hill Country Park on the 23rd.

The **Peacock *Inachis io*** also appeared first on 19 March, and at the same two localities as the previous species and by the end of the month it had been seen at 17 widely scattered localities with again a maximum of four at Shepshed.

Finally, the **Comma *Polygonia c-album*** was first reported out of hibernation on 7 March when one was seen in JH's Loughborough garden and another was seen flying amongst Alders on the western edge of Buddon Wood at Quorn. During the remainder of the month it was reported seen at 14 separate localities and two individuals were noted at four of these localities.

Peter Gamble

MOTHS

The freezing weather more or less continued and January was mainly a cold blur allowing the temperature to rise on only a few nights. February started even more frustratingly although temperatures were favourable we had to put up with gale force conditions, not an ideal situation to be sitting around a moth light in the middle of a wood. Some beautiful sunny days started March, with mainly cold evenings to follow, but there were a few nights when moths were picked up in the car headlights. Daytime temperatures rocketed towards the end of March, and although most of these nights were clear, the first two or three hours made for some very rewarding early season mothing sessions.

Light trap results

SFW managed to operate an Actinic light trap in his Groby garden for five nights during this quarter. These were one night in both January and February and three in March for a total of 23 moths of nine species. Singles of **Early Moth *Theria primaria*** and **Chestnut *Conistra vaccinii***



Chestnut © Steve Woodward

13 January, 23 February produced a lonesome **Dotted Border *Agriopis marginaria***. A smattering of the ever-reliable **Orthosias** provided support from mid-March with a single

Early Grey *Xylocampa areola* on 20 March. Last moth of the quarter was 28 March, when a single ***Diurnea fagella*** was found at rest on a window during the day.

PHG operated a light trap in his Quorn garden on two occasions, both in March with 76 moths of 12 species. 21 March was a particularly successful night as Peter recorded 59 moths of 11 species. These included two ***Diurnea fagella***. 20 and 21 March must have been the trigger for this species as they were recorded widely around the county from these dates onwards. Also a single ***Acleris hastiana*** over-wintered from last autumn, larvae of which feed on the various small-leaved Sallows. Also out of hibernation was one **Red-green Carpet *Chloroclysta siterata***, this species has gone from quite a rarity to being expected on any mild night throughout the late winter and early spring months. The very pleasing sight of ten **Oak Beauty *Biston strataria*** must have stood out from the gaggle of **Orthosias**. A few days later with less favourable conditions just five species were recorded, with the first **Engrailed *Ectropis bistortata***, for the year.

Charnwood Forest Survey

Grace Dieu Wood

On one of the few mild nights of the month HI, SFW and myself decided to risk a few hours here on 13 January with 29 moths of eight species. We know it happens every year, but you can't fail to be impressed when something as flimsy as ***Ypsolopha ustella*** a small micro moth survives months of being frozen and thawed out. After all this it emerges on the first relatively warm night to get on with business as usual. We had four that night, flitting around the light regardless. This little moth is an Oak feeder and just one of the many micros that hibernate over the winter. Another micro moth was four ***Tortricodes alternella***. Feeding mainly on Oak, this species does not usually put in an appearance until the beginning of February, so, despite the big freeze up they decided to put on an early show! A single **Red-green Carpet *Chloroclysta siterata***, more **Winter Moth *Operophtera brumata***, two **Pale Brindled Beauty *Phigalia pilosaria***, one **Mottled Umber *Erannis defoliaria*** and a solitary **Chestnut *Conistra vaccinii*** completed the night's catch.

Together with HI & SFW we recorded over 450 moths of 24 species here on a mild 21 March. It proved to be quite a night for the over-wintering micro moths *Agonopterix heracliana*, *alstromeriana* and *ocellana* with 17, two and three respectively. **Brindled Pug** *Eupithecia abbreviata* was out in force with a total of 38, but surprisingly only a single **Red Chestnut** *Cerastis rubricosa*. Amongst the usual *Orthosia* crew, was a solitary very smart **Lead-coloured Drab** *Orthosia populeti*, this species is mainly an Aspen feeder, not really that common as a food plant on the Charnwood Forest. The only two species with over 100 individuals were **Small Quaker** *Orthosia cruda* and **Common Quaker** *Orthosia cerasi*.

On 23 March HI & SFW managed to see a total of six **Orange Underwing** *Archiearis parthenias* in two separate areas, whilst on the unit survey. I recorded a single of this species at Lount Nature Reserve in early March. These are the only records received of this species, despite having the best weather during its flight season for many years.

Charnwood Lodge

Quite a mild night for 24 February yielded just under 400 moths of 11 species, with *Tortricodes alternella* making up 255 individuals; **March Moth** *Alsophila aescularia* came in second with 54 individuals. Other usual candidates were eight **Yellow Horned** *Achyla flavicornis*, 16 **Pale Brindled Beauty** *Phigalia pilosaria*, six **Oak Beauty** *Biston strataria*, 14 **Spring Usher** *Agriopsis leucophaearia*, 18 **Dotted Border** *Agriopsis marginaria*, three **Engrailed** *Ectropis bistortata*, a single **Early Moth** *Theria primaria*, three **Common Quaker** *Orthosia cerasi* plus eight **Chestnut** *Conistra vaccinii*.



Engrailed © Steve Woodward

Stoneywell Wood

A welcome return to this wonderful woodland on 11 February by kind permission of Mr Gimson. Fine drizzle started the night off, ending in heavy rain about 21:30, nevertheless a rewarding session with 324 moths of six species. The micro moth *Tortricodes alternella* was really out in force with 191 recorded just around the light traps, many more were on the wing throughout the wood. Nine **March Moth** *Alsophila aescularia*, 39 **Pale Brindled Beauty** *Phigalia pilosaria* plus 37 **Spring Usher** *Agriopsis leucophaearia*, the first of the season, still yet to find a female of this species. 47 **Dotted Border** *Agriopsis marginaria* and a single **Chestnut** *Conistra vaccinii*.

The Outwoods

A good start for the first trip of the year to The Outwoods on 20 March where almost 300 moths of 22 species were recorded. A single



Oak Beauty © Steve Woodward

bright orange *Zelleria hepariella* was a nice record here, quite a local species nationally, even though its food plant is Ash. It is a lovely little moth, resting head down and rear in the air, it is also a category D for us, which means it is quite scarce and/or little is known of it in our county. A total of 36, **Yellow Horned** *Achyla flavicornis* and 23 **Oak Beauty** *Biston strataria* both good woodland species. A single of the most unlikely looking *noctuid* **Oak Nycteoline** *Nycteola revayana* this is another species that seems to be getting recorded more frequently.

Around the county

Pickworth Great Wood

A bumper night here with KT on 22 March, although the temperature dropped very quickly, 13°C to 4°C in just under three hours, moths

were streaming in for the first hour and a half. Although we counted 3,970 individuals of 24 species, literally twice as many moths were sitting around on the ground and on surrounding vegetation were not counted, so the night's total could easily be over 8,000 moths, quite a sight. Two very different *Acleris cristana* were fresh out of hibernation, this really is a moth of great variation. Lt. Col. Manley in his 1973 "A Guide to *Acleris cristana*" provides a key to 119 distinct forms, all of which are meticulously illustrated in colour by S. N. A. Jacobs. Pickworth is the site for **Small Brindled Beauty** *Apochiema hispidaria* so 16 was a pleasing total, as was 18 **White Marked** *Cerastis leucographa*, both species are specialities of the woodlands in the "far east" but Pickworth remains the favourite. The Aspen feeding **Lead-coloured Drab** *Orthosia populeti* was very well represented by an incredible 27 individuals, being the highest count of this species I have seen anywhere. For sheer numbers, **Small Quaker** *Orthosia cruda* reached 1,278 and **Common Quaker** *Orthosia cerasi* reached 1,388. **Twin-spotted Quaker** *Orthosia munda* could only manage a measly 470 so came in third position in the numbers stakes.

Aylestone Meadow

First trip to this important city site, a large area with varied habitat, so it will be interesting to see how we get on here. 25 March was clear and cool, dropping down to 5°C; consequently few species were recorded but at least we have started a list off at this new site. A total of 96 moths of 11 species included 16 *Diurnea fagella*, two **Shoulder Stripe** *Anticlea badiata* plus the usual assortment of *Orthosia* species.

Cloud Wood

5 February as the gales settled down to a mere 18 mph and the temperature up at 11°C a few hours at this superb site produced 84 moths of seven species. Another hibernating micro moth a single *Agonopterix heracliana* whose larvae feed on various umbellifers was one of the first moths down. *Tortricodes alternella* numbers increased to a respectable 63, a lone **March Moth** *Alsophila aescularia*, five **Pale Brindled Beauty** *Phigalia pilosaria*. Find of the night was a gorgeous, totally wingless female **Mottled Umber** *Erannis defoliaria*, this being only the second female of this species I have ever seen.

Out of six **Early Moth** *Theria primaria* five were the reduced wing females and lastly six **Chestnut** *Conistra vaccinii*.

Many thanks for the records sent in for this often, lean quarter.

Graham and Anona Finch

OTHER INSECTS

After a very cold start to the year the weather improved considerably in the final few weeks of this quarter enabling more invertebrate activity than was evident in the last year or two.

Heteroptera.

This is not usually a very active quarter for this group. There were five **Green Shield Bugs** *Palomina prasina* sitting on Ivy leaves at Beatty Avenue, Leicester on 12 February, all in hibernation colours, the only other record was one at Loughborough at the end of the month.

The only **Hawthorn Shield Bug** *Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale* noted was at Birstall and the **Dock Bug** *Coreus marginatus* was seen in the middle and end of February at the same location.

Diptera

The only hoverfly records were for single **Marmalade Hoverfly** *Episyrphus balteatus* at Thurnby Lodge on 26 March and at Grace Dieu on the 29th.

This has been a remarkable quarter for the **Dark-edged Bee-fly** *Bombylius major* with far more records for March than previous years. The first record was of one at Quorn on 25 March, with several active in PHG's garden after that date. Others were at Bradgate Park, Grace



Dark-edged Bee-fly © Steve Woodward

Dieu, Barkby, Appleton Park, Evington Park, Monks Rest, Scraftoft Lane, and at Willow Brook Park on the 25th, where I counted ten in a small area.

Apocrita

As is usual for this quarter the Apocrita form the bulk of records. **Buff-tailed Bumblebees *Bombus terrestris*** were, as usual, the most widely reported. Only two records for February this year, a queen at Barlestone on 11 February and two workers foraging crocus and snowdrops on 24 February at Castle Gardens. Further records in March from the 8th at Castle Gardens, with other records from the middle of the month - a maximum of four in a garden at Barlestone on the 14th, and then widespread from this date. Rather surprisingly, PHG in his Quorn garden did not record his first queen until 20 March. In recent years he has recorded this species in January, I expect the bitterly cold December was responsible for the lack of early activity this year. The **Early-nesting Bumblebee *Bombus pratorum*** had two February records, at Quorn on the 13th and 18th. Queens were collecting pollen from winter-flowering Honeysuckle and two queens were foraging Snowdrops at Castle Gardens on the 24th. They were becoming more widespread in March with further records from Barlestone, Quorn, Appleton Park and Abney Street in Leicester. There has been some suggestion that the **White-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus lucorum*** is actually an aggregate of several species, so I shall use the name to refer to the aggregate. A few queens were recorded from 21 March, at Barlestone, Grace Dieu and Appleton Park in Leicester.

The only queens of the **Common Carder bee *Bombus pascuorum*** received were from Castle Gardens on 20 March and further records from Barlestone, Abney Street and Appleton Park, probably under-recorded. Queens of the **Red-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus lapidarius*** were first noted at Market Bosworth, one on the pavement on 24 February, and other records for the last week in March were from Barlestone, Bradgate Park, Quorn, Evington Park, Appleton Park and Victoria Park.

The only record of the **Garden Bumblebee *Bombus hortorum*** was from Barlestone on 28 March, foraging on Pulmonaria and the only

record of the **Tree Bumblebee *Bombus hypnorum*** recorded this quarter was from Quorn, with a queen visiting Honeysuckle on 25 February and from 7 March frequent until the end of the month.

Moving on to solitary bees, the **Hairy-footed Flower Bee *Anthophora plumipes*** males were first recorded at Quorn on 12 March, my garden on the 19th, about average, others were at Great Central Way and foraging on Red Dead-nettle in Evington Park. Females were first sighted on 23 March at Quorn, 25th in Loughborough and my garden on the 29th.

The **Tawny Mining Bee *Andrena fulva*** was widely reported in the last week of March with females from Groby, Bradgate Park, Woodhouse, Appleton Park, Evington Park and Barlestone. At the latter site, ten soil mounds were counted on the 31st of the month. A female ***Andrena haemorrhoa*** was on the embankment on Great Central Way on 23 March. Other species from this group, a male ***Andrena chrysoceles*** at Appleton Park on 28 March and ***Andrena clarkella*** at Bradgate on the 31st, a very early and impressive bee associated with Sallow blossom. On 25 March at Bradgate Park, HI found her first *Andrena* parasitised by *Stylops*. [This very strange insect, whose female lacks both limbs and eyes, attaches itself to the bee's abdomen – Ed.] .

A few **Honey Bee *Apis mellifera*** records were submitted, with sightings in February from Stoke Golding, at Twycross foraging Heather, Quorn from 12 February visiting winter-flowering Honeysuckle and many present from 7 March, foraging *Viburnum tinus* at Welford Road Cemetery on the same date.

Vespinae

A **Hornet *Vespa crabro*** was found hibernating in rotten wood on 15 January at Ulverscroft NR, The **Saxon Wasp *Dolichovespula saxonica*** was also found in rotten log at the same site on 6 February. A queen ***Paravespula vulgaris*** was recorded Great Central Way on 23 March, probably under-recorded.

Coleoptera

The most interesting record from this quarter is a **Green Tiger Beetle *Cicindela campestris*** found

at Bradgate Park on a south-facing slope by SFW on 28 March, a very early date for this sun-loving insect. I remember many years ago finding a small colony on the large disused rail cutting at Scaford, but believe Bradgate Park and Ketton Quarry are the only known sites in the county at the present time.

A ground beetle *Notiophilus biguttatus* was noted at Grace Dieu on 21 March and the burying beetle *Necrophorus humator* was attracted to the light trap at PHG's garden on 22 March at Quorn.

Ladybirds

The **Seven-spot Ladybird** *Coccinella 7-punctata* was widely reported this quarter from 13 January and widespread everywhere by the middle of March. The only **Two-spot Ladybirds** *Adalia bipunctata* seen were two at Birstall Meadow Lane Allotments in February and one at Grace Dieu on 13 March. **Harlequin Ladybirds** *Harmonia axyridis* were late emerging in March, numbers were seen on a bedroom window sill in Quorn on 21 March and singles at Ulverscroft NR and Birstall also in March.

Other members of this group recorded were the **22-spot Ladybird** *Psyllobora 22-punctata* at Grace Dieu and the **Kidney-spot Ladybird** *Chilocorus renipustulatus* at the same site both on 21 March. The **10-spot Ladybird** *Adalia 10-punctata* was found in leaf litter at Grace Dieu on 17 February and one was beaten from pine. Three colour forms were beaten from gorse at Ulverscroft NR on 24 March: a very variable species.

Thanks to the seven members who submitted records for this group.

Howard Bradshaw

FLOWERING PLANTS & FERNS

There are only a few records this quarter from only three recorders. Obviously the severe winter has left its mark.

Nevertheless things have carried on. **Hazel** catkins appeared very early and 19 January was the first record. Most plants did not seem to get on the way until the end of March when the dry spell came and slowed everything up again.



Round-leaved Crowfoot © Steve Woodward

Some Plants of Interest This Quarter

Round-leaved Crowfoot *Ranunculus omiophyllus*: was at Cademan and Grace Dieu where there were many leaves in shallow pond – not previously noticed here.

Goldilocks *Ranunculus auricomus*: in Swithland Waterworks: Colony still present by footpath where it was found 40 years ago.

Climbing Fumitory *Ceratocarpus claviculata*: was found at Bardon Hill.

Lady's Smock *Cardamine pratensis*: in Syston Road, Cossington several plants were in flower at the side of the road. In Nanpantan Road, Loughborough a small colony was noted on a grassy area at the side of the road. Unfortunately within hours of finding them they were mown down. They must have survived there since the road was built so I am sure they will appear again next year.

Bird's-foot *Ornithopus purpusillus*: at Castle Hill, Mountsorrel, many plants were on grassy mounds above the path which has steps from the main road. More plants were noted than in recent years possibly due to the summer fire providing ground for colonising.

Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*: at Buddon Brook Meadows, Quorn colonies were in flower on the brook side. Several new colonies were noted. At Grace Dieu Wood they were noted in two areas of the wood.

Pill Sedge *Carex pilulifera*: Located at The Outwoods and Jubilee Wood where a few plants were in flower in an area which was once covered by it. Increased shade by brambles and the increasing size of young trees has reduced the area available for it.

Ferns

Hart's-tongue Fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium*: at Swithland Wood a colony of 12+ plants were found on ditch-side north of the meadow/plantation area. Previously this was only noted in the wood as occasional plants on the cliff of the central quarry. At Watermead Country Park several plants were on ditch-side banks.



Rustyback © Steve Woodward

Rustyback *Ceterach officinarum*: at Grace Dieu Manor Farm there were 14 plants on a big stone wall.

Eric Webster

OTHER RECORDS

Records were also received, mainly from Grace Dieu and Ulverscroft, of:

Chilopoda
Diplopoda
Isopoda
Molluscs
Collembola
Orthoptera
Dermaptera
Neuroptera
Trichoptera
Mosses – also found at Bradgate, Bardon and Mountsorrel
Liverworts
Lichens
Fungi

Details of all records are available to members in digital or printed form from Helen Ikin.

WEATHER

After an extraordinary November and December, January's weather proved to be far less dramatic. Afternoon temperatures averaged about 6.5°C, a fraction below normal while night time temperatures averaged around the 1°C mark which made the mean temperature about 4°C, slightly below normal but considerably milder than last January. There were 12 night-time frosts recorded mainly in the second half of the month. Once again the month was a dry one. Jim Lofts at Nanpantan recorded 42 mm of rain, which is less than two thirds of the usual figure. At Mountsorrel I only recorded 31 mm: about half the usual total. A sunshine total of 62 hours was close to average in Mountsorrel. Snow only fell on four days during the month and none of these were significant falls. The month opened with a cool NW flow and there were a few snow showers around. The second week saw the arrival of some very mild sub tropical Atlantic air for the first time since early November. The 10th saw temperatures at Jim's station peak at 14°C by day and only fell at night to 10°C about 8°C above the normal figure and a very marked contrast to nights in December. This second week saw most of the rainfall too. During week three, high pressures developed over the country. This gave us long clear days at times and some cold frost nights. Winds remained light, however, and there was very little rainfall and this weather continued into the final week. By this time the high had moved a little further north and we had an easterly wind develop over us. This gave us a cold final few days with just a maximum temperature on the 28th of 1.5°C and at night temperatures dropped to -4.5°C at Nanpantan. Nearly eight hours of sunshine on the 31st, however, gave us a cheery end to the month. So, in the end, a quiet weather month.

February was an extremely mild month. Mean temperatures averaged 7°C, which was 2.5°C above normal. Daily afternoon maximums were logged at 9.3°C while night time temperatures recorded 4.3°C. There were only three air frosts recorded at Mountsorrel and snow did not fall at all in February. It was my mildest February in Mountsorrel in my 12 years of records while nationally it was the 9th warmest February on record. Winds blew mainly

from the west or southwest, which is always a mild direction but a cloudy one too. Sunshine totals were very low with just 46 hours of sunshine recorded in Mountsorrel with 12 days logging no sunshine at all. The mild but moist airmass caused it to be a wet month with 62 mm of rain falling at Jim's station in Nanpantan, which was 16% above normal with Mountsorrel recording 48 mm which is the usual total for the month.

The month opened with some very strong winds. The period the 3rd-7th logged gale force gusts every day with my maximum gust at Mountsorrel being 48 mph. At East Midlands Airport the winds reached 54 mph and there was some slight structural damage to local properties. Temperatures in the first week reached 14°C in our area but the mainly cloudy skies and strong winds took the edge off these. It remained mild throughout the first two weeks but became colder and very wet in the third week. The wettest day was the 18th when 11 mm of rain was logged at both stations. The coldest day was recorded at Nanpantan on the 21st when temperatures only reached 4.5°C. Temperatures then recovered and the 24th was the warmest and sunniest day on the month. Temperatures reached 14.5°C at Nanpantan and coupled with six hours of sunshine it really did feel spring had arrived.

The winter really did bring us a huge contrast in weather. Temperatures over the December to February period averaged 3.2°C at Mountsorrel, which is 1°C below normal. However last winter was colder than this one, with all three winter months last year below average. This year after the bitter December, which was the coldest for 120 years, we then had near average temperatures in January and very mild temperatures in February which helped to balance out the season. We have still now had however three colder winters than average in a row but these colder winters have followed ten milder ones in the previous years before that! Rainfall was below average for the winter as a whole in Mountsorrel at 103 mm or only two thirds of the expected figure with sunshine totals at 170 hours or 15% below the expected figure.

So a very varied winter and the weather as always will always keep us guessing! Thanks to

Jim Lofts for his figures and Philip Eden for the national statistics!

Phil Morrish

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following members and friends have contributed by sending in their records, from which this bulletin has been compiled.

H Bradshaw (HB), C Dolphin, G Felstead (GF), G L Finch (GLF), A Finch, D B Forgham, P H Gamble, J Graham (JG), C Green, J Green (JaG), P M Hardy (PMH), J Haynes, P Hipkin (PH), B Hollingworth, J Hollingwoth, H B Hope (HBH), H Ikin, A Johnson, J Killingback, P Killingback, S M Lister, M McClellan, A T Onions, G Panter, D A Perry, F T Smith, J M Stanley, K Tailby, M Vincent, D Webster, E Webster, S F Woodward.

Records for the second quarter of 2011 should be sent to :

Helen Ikin, 237 Forest Road, Woodhouse, Loughborough, Leics. LE12 8TZ.

email: helen@canids.freeserve.co.uk

preferably by 15 July.

Please note that on the Programme Card Helen's email address and telephone number are both incorrect.