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FIFTY-YEAR ARCHIVE OF CLUB RECORDS NOW EASILY ACCESSIBLE

Thanks to Rocio!

What sets the Loughborough Naturalists' Club apart from most other similar societies is our focus on gathering and publishing biological records. Members are encouraged to write down their wildlife



Rocio Rodriguez © Helen Ikin

observations and submit their records to the editor(s) of the quarterly journal Heritage. Records for the various groups (Birds, Flowers, and so on) are collated then forwarded to specialist writers who prepare a summary for Heritage. The summaries are stitched together by the editor(s) and Heritage is published. We must have been round this loop more than 200 times now, so I guess nearly 100,000 records have been processed. The accounts in Heritage are only summaries - it is impossible to publish the full details of every record - but the original paper records have been archived at the Leicestershire & Rutland Environmental Records Centre (LRERC), formerly at Holly Hayes but now housed at County Hall. These records are available to any member willing to wade through them - there are three filing cabinets full!

In practice, it is a time-consuming business to visit the archive, find the relevant folder and pull out the records of interest. Searching through the whole archive for records of a particular species, or place, or recorder, is not really practical. Thanks to a joint project between the Club and LRERC, this is all about to change. The paper records have been electronically scanned so that they can be stored on a computer or a disc (DVD). Furthermore, a catalogue has been prepared that indexes the groups, places and recorders mentioned in each batch of records. The batches of records are organised into quarters within each year. The catalogue is set up in such a way that you can view the image of the paper records directly from it, so it is now twenty times quicker to browse through the records to find the information you need. This

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need not be done at County Hall: anyone owning a computer with Excel Spreadsheet and Adobe Reader programs installed can view copies of the records on a DVD. The paper records will be retained.

Most of the hard work of scanning and indexing has been done by Rocio Rodriguez at LRERC. The Club is indebted to Rocio for her tireless dedication to this task and to her skill in preparing the catalogue from the hand-written records. Harry Clements' handwriting was particularly challenging! Club members Helen Ikin, Steve Woodward, John and Kate Ward have spent many hours helping to prepare the pages for scanning, by removing rusty old staples, pasting scraps of flimsy paper onto A4 sheets and numbering pages. Rocio has been so efficient, we have struggled to keep up with her! The scanning is complete and the catalogue is currently being checked. We have not scanned certain groups - Birds, Lepidoptera, Odonata - completely because those records have already been put onto databases. The early records, however, were not sorted into groups, so it was easier to scan everything rather than to separate them out.

I believe this is a very significant step forward in getting our valuable information out of the filing cabinets into the public domain where it can be put to good use. Extracting individual records and putting them onto a database no longer seems such a daunting task - in fact we have done it for old records relevant to the Club's Grace Dieu Unit Survey. The records clearly document the rise and fall of certain species: Grey Squirrels and Collared Doves, for example, were being recorded enthusiastically in the early 1960s as newcomers. On the other hand, records of Water Voles and Redstarts fall off alarmingly: Pat Candlish was able to list 14 Charnwood localities for Redstarts in August 1963 - sadly, we would be lucky to find one in 2012.

The archive is also a rich resource for anyone interested in the personalities that have kept the club going - the raw data is enlivened with many stories of wildlife encounters. In the early years, these were often in the form of letters and post-cards, which occasionally included personal snippets. Certain recorders were inclined to add details to their sightings, above

and beyond what was strictly necessary for a biological record. These are often amusing, for example, Dorothy Fieldhouse tells us that her tadpoles "enjoy a piece of cooked tripe" and that her neighbour would venture out at night "to look for toads with his Hallowe'en lantern". When another observer found a small mammal trapped in a beer bottle, he felt it necessary to add the brand of beer (Watneys). In 1969, Bernard Clark regularly watched Water Voles near Barrow and learned to recognise one individual - "Arthur". We read regular updates on his antics until one fateful day, when Arthur had an unfortunate encounter with a mowing machine. Sketches and photographs sometimes turn up and we even found a superb water-colour painting by Claude Henderson of the Death's-head Hawk-moth that was found in a Loughborough factory in 1963. The moth's appearance was well-timed, as it took pride of place in a public exhibition staged by the club. A newspaper clipping about the exhibition mentions that "I M Evans, in addition to bringing along skins of white stoats, moles and a weasel, delighted the audience when he produced a live Manx Shearwater"!



Death's-head Hawk-moth by Claude Henderson

So as well as the bare facts about our local wildlife, there is a wealth of information here about the club, its members and their (sometimes quirky) behaviour. It is entertaining simply to browse at random and see what crops up - like Muriel Statham's 1979 record of "big, fat, ugly brown caterpillars on cabbage and lettuce". I can just picture her face when she found them.

Hopefully, the editing of the catalogue will be finished by the time this article is published. Contact Helen Ikin or myself for details of how to get a copy of the DVD.

Steve Woodward

CLASSIFIED RECORDS

MAMMALS

The only **Hedgehog** sightings are from ATO who saw his first of the year on 23 March in a neighbour's Shelthorpe garden. His own hedgehog, which was thought to have hibernated in the roots of an ivy, appeared on 24 March and was seen regularly until the end of the quarter along with another smaller one which was around from 29 March.

Moles at Swithland were active throughout the quarter and molehills were also noted at Bradgate Park, Ulverscroft NR and Grace Dieu.

The remains of two **Common Shrews** were found in owl pellets collected in the Newtown Linford area.

The single **Bat** record was of two small ones at Lakeside at Thurnby seen by GF and GH.

A **Brown Hare** was seen by SFW running through the snow in Bradgate Park in early February.

Three members reported **Rabbits** at Swithland, Buddon Brook Meadows in Quorn, Watermead CP Reedbed NR and Grace Dieu.

PHG is still being visited by **Grey Squirrels** – up to six at a time visiting his Quorn bird feeders and eating Wych Elm flower buds in a nearby wood. They were also present in Bradgate Park, Grace Dieu and Sheet Hedges Wood.

Five **Bank Voles** weighing between 14 and 18 grams were caught in Longworth traps at Grace Dieu in mid March and two skulls were found in owl pellets at Newtown Linford.

A partly eaten **Field Vole** was found by PHG on his garden path in Quorn and three skulls were in the owl pellets at Newtown Linford.

A 21 gram **Wood Mouse** was caught in the traps at Grace Dieu.

On the evening of 10 February, SM saw a **Red Fox** crossing the road near the frozen Swithland Reservoir, one was at Groby Rifle Range in mid March and DAP sent in nine sightings of foxes – some in his Swithland garden – one eating a rabbit and from Ulverscroft, a Long Whatton garden, Woodhouse – two on a grass verge and the crag at Swithland Reservoir

where one was barking at 8 am one January morning.

DAP also sent in the only **Stoat** record – he watched one at Swithland for five minutes, drinking from the bird bath and exploring the garden borders.

Badger road casualties were noted at Swithland, Long Whatton, Woodhouse Eaves and Melton. Setts were found in the west of the county.

Reeve's Muntjac were seen in January and March in Swithland and at Ulverscroft in March.

In late January, two **Roe Deer** were in Sheet Hedges Wood for several days. SFW and HI were lucky enough to see them as they leapt away through the bushes.

On 20 March, two **Fallow Deer** bucks were seen trotting down the roadside verge on Warren Hill at about 10:45 pm. They had obviously escaped from Bradgate Park. At the bottom of the hill, they turned towards Cropston and vanished into the darkness.

Helen Ikin

BIRDS

There were no double-figure counts of **Mute Swans** during the quarter but pairs were noted at five sites some of which had previously held breeding birds.

Away from the Soar Valley area, small numbers of **Greylag Geese** were found at other waters and included hybrid birds at Abbey Park. The largest flock of **Canada Geese** noted was 40 at Abbey Park on 4 February with the only other double-figure count coming from Cropston Reservoir, peaking at 19 on the 18th. A pair was present at this site throughout March and at Shepshed Quarry South and also at Grace Dieu where an egg was found. A wandering pair of **Egyptian Geese** was spotted at Cropston Reservoir on a number of dates during the quarter, at nearby Bradgate Park and at Groby Pool.

A pair of **Shelduck**, probably last year's breeding pair, was at Cropston Reservoir from 1 March and was joined by a second pair five days later. Display was noted on the 11th but

the rising water levels seemed to have put paid to any breeding success this year and they were not seen after the 18th. What was probably one of these two pairs was at Swithland Reservoir during the month. Pairs of **Mandarin Duck** were noted at three sites. The only double-figure count came from Cropston Reservoir when six pairs were seen on 25 March. Three-figure counts of wintering **Wigeon** were at four locations with site maxima being: 482 at Swithland Reservoir on 12 February, 300 at Cossington Meadows three days later, c350 at Watermead CP North on 18 January and 120 at Sence Valley on the 17th. What was probably the same summering male of the last three years was pursuing a female Mallard at Cropston Reservoir on 31 March. **Gadwall** were noted on six waters, with a three-figure count being noted at Swithland Reservoir when 155 were there on 12 February. At Kelham Bridge 25 birds were seen on the 28th whilst 20 pairs were at Cropston Reservoir on 25 March. By far and away the largest count of **Teal**, and only one in excess of 100, was at Swithland Reservoir with 267 on 12 February. The only other counts of note were 62 at Cropston Reservoir on 25 March and 50 at Watermead CP North on the 14th. Only Cropston Reservoir had a three-figure count of **Mallard**, with 132 there on 4 February. There were 75 at Abbey Park the same day and 44 on Ulverscroft Pond on the 1st. A very obliging pair of **Garganey** (my favourite duck species) was at Easthorpe Bridge in Belvoir during the last week of February. Double-figure counts of **Shoveler** were at three waters but only Watermead CP Birstall had in excess of 15 with c40 there on 22 February. Double-figure flocks of **Pochard** came from Cropston and Swithland Reservoirs with site maxima being 47 (29 males) at the former and 38 at the latter, with both counts being made on 12 February.

There were no flocks of **Tufted Duck** in excess of 100, the highest count noted being 62 at Cropston Reservoir on 3 February. By the middle of March most waters had a number of pairs looking for suitable breeding areas. Small numbers of **Goldeneye** were recorded during the quarter with the last noted on 1 March. Most records of **Goosander** came from the Soar Valley area with the highest count being seven at both Watermead CP North on 18 January and Cossington Meadows on 1 March. Away from



Garganey © Jim Graham

this region, a pair was at Sence Valley FP on 2 January, three at Staunton Harold Reservoir on 8 February and a lone female flew across Swithland Reservoir four days later.

The only **Red-legged Partridge** count of note was 11 at Braunston-in-Rutland on 24 March whilst the only **Grey Partridge** seen was one at nearby Plungar three days later. A group of 21 **Pheasant** was also at the former site.

Double-figure counts of **Cormorants** came from three locations where maxima were 50 at Cropston Reservoir on 10 January, ten at Watermead CP Birstall on 22 February and 24 at Groby Pool on 31 March where nesting activity was also noted.

Up to four **Little Egrets** were on a garden stream in Swithland through the quarter whilst three were in the Shepshed area during the final week of February. Singles were noted at a further three sites. Small numbers of **Grey Heron** came from seven sites and by the end of March birds were occupying nests at Groby Pool.

Little Grebes were noted ten sites with ten birds being found at Abbey Park on 4 February - no doubt being concentrated by the frozen waters. The only significant count of **Great Crested Grebe** came from Cropston Reservoir with 32 on 4 February the highest. Pairs displaying and reed dancing at this site were seen from the 11th.

All **Red Kite** records came from the east of the county including two at both Saxby and Buckminster on 20 February. **Sparrowhawk** were at 16 sites including four gardens. However, **Buzzard** was encountered at 30 widespread locations mainly in ones and twos

but 17 were in the Belvoir area on 23 March, 12 were drifting northwest over Swithland on the 21st and ten (two groups of five) were in the air for at least 30 minutes over Cropston Reservoir on the 11th. Records of **Kestrel** came from an excellent 30 locations in contrast to just eight in the same quarter in 2011: mainly singles but pairs were found at six. **Peregrines** were noted at five sites with pairs observed at two of these.

There were no double-figure counts of **Moorhen** and records came from just three sites, the highest count being eight at Poultney Farm on 19 February. Likewise, numbers of **Coot** were well down on expectations with just two sites having double-figure counts the highest being 30 at Abbey Park on 4 February.

Oystercatcher were located at two sites in the quarter both in March, two at Hicks Lodge on the 10th and three at Cossington Meadows on the 28th. This site also held the first record of returning **Little Ringed Plover** for the season and the only one for the quarter, also on the 28th. Up to 25 Golden Plover were in fields adjacent to Sence Valley FP mid-January. The best counts of **Lapwing** were 400 at Cossington Meadows on 1 January with 300 at nearby Birstall Meadows on the 13th and 100 at Hicks Lodge on the 29th. Display or breeding activity was noted at four areas. Eight **Snipe** were at Welby on 29 March with small numbers at two other sites. **Woodcock** were located at Grace Dieu Wood on 11 January and 24 February. There were just two records of wintering **Green Sandpiper** with two at both Cropston Reservoir on 15 January and Watermead CP North on 14 March. All **Redshank** records occurred during March with the first at Hicks Lodge on the 10th, one at Watermead CP North on the 14th and four at Cossington Meadows on the 28th.

There appears to be a reluctance of members to record numbers gulls on and around our waters and few records were received. However five adult **Little Gulls** at Cropston Reservoir on 27 March was a welcome sight in the area.

Most **Stock Dove** records were of one or two and no feeding flocks were noted. The largest and only four-figure count of **Wood Pigeon** came from Swithland when 2100 were feeding in an oilseed rape field on 26 January. Counts in

excess of 200 came from Cropston, Tur Langton and Kibworth Beauchamp. There were no double-figure counts of **Collared Dove**: up to four were noted at five sites.

Single **Barn Owls** were reported from five locations whilst the only **Little Owls** being recorded were a pair at Bradgate Park which was seen in all three months. Reports of **Tawny Owl** came from six sites with most records involving calling birds including gardens in Rothley and Cropston. An influx of **Short-eared Owls** into the country resulted in birds residing in the area with up to five being seen on a regular basis at Hicks Lodge and at least two at Cossington Meadows.

Thankfully **Kingfishers** seem to have recovered not only from last year's big freeze but also this year's inclement weather with records in the quarter coming from five sites compared to one single record in 2011. Reports of **Green Woodpeckers** came from 16 widespread sites with the highest count being three at Bradgate Park. **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** were even more widespread with 21 sites involved including five gardens; drumming birds were reported from six sites and pairs at three others but no records were received for **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. At least one **Great Grey Shrike** was in the Plungar area of Belvoir from 21st March to the end of the quarter.

Few records of **Magpies** and **Jay** were received and just one or two birds were involved in each. The largest count of **Jackdaw** was just 96 at Bradgate Park with 74 in Shepshed Quarry South the only other significant count. Surprisingly, there were no **Rookery** counts and numbers of **Carrion Crow** were in single figures. One or two **Raven** were seen at seven widespread sites with display and calling noted at three.

Records of **Goldcrests** came from 11 sites mainly one or two but 13 were found at The Outwoods on 14 January. Song was heard at seven sites including six birds at Benscliffe Wood also on the 14th. The best and only double-figure count of **Blue Tit** came from Cropston Reservoir with 13 there on 11 March. An incredible total of at least 100 **Great Tits** were located in the lower section of Beacon Hill CP on

21 January feeding in flocks of between 20 and 30. Counts of ten or less came from 11 other sites. Small numbers of **Coal Tit** were recorded at ten sites but 15 were found at The Outwoods and 13 at Benscliffe Wood both on 14 January. Most of the birds at both these sites were already in song. There were few records of **Marsh Tit** with four sites having one or two birds whilst records of **Willow Tit** only came from Cropston Reservoir and Kelham Bridge.

No significant wintering flocks of **Sky Lark** were noted but records of singing or display came from eight sites where the highest count was nine at Cropston on 11 January.

The first **Sand Martins** of the year recorded in the area were on 31 March when 55 were noted at Cropston Reservoir feeding over the water before heading off to the northeast.

One or two singing **Cetti's Warblers** were heard in all three months at Watermead CP North. **Long-tailed Tits** were widely recorded from 21 sites with double-figure counts coming from five the highest being 14 at both St James' churchyard, Birstall on 3 January and Swithland Reservoir on 12 February.

All records of **Chiffchaff** were reported in the second half of March with the first birds in song at Shepshed Quarry South on the 15th. Numbers here increased to five on the 28th whilst five were also singing at Cropston Reservoir on the 25th. Song was noted at a further nine sites by the end of the quarter. Wintering **Blackcaps** were reported from three gardens whilst the first in song was noted at Groby Pool on 31st March.

One or two **Nuthatch** were at 15 sites with seven at The Outwoods on 14 January the highest count, whilst **Treecreeper** were at 11 localities.

Wren were mainly seen in ones and twos but at least six were at Cropston Reservoir that included birds in song and one with nesting material on 25 March.

There were just two double-figure counts of **Starling**, both in January, and neither exceeded 20. Likewise, double-figure counts of **Blackbirds** came from just three locations each being less than 20. Conversely, the largest flock of **Fieldfare** was 421 at Cropston on 3 February and

counts in excess of 100 came from a further four sites and double-figure counts from three more. One was singing in Deer Park Wood in Bradgate Park on 11 January. As seems to be normal, there were smaller numbers of **Redwing** with 57 at Bradgate Park on 18 February and 50 at Cossington Meadows on 1 March by far the two best counts. **Song Thrushes** were at 12 sites mainly in one or twos whilst records of **Mistle Thrush** came from six with song noted at two of these.

The largest count of **Robins** occurred at Broad Hill on 13 March when 16 singing birds were heard. This site also held 12 **Duncock** including a group of five singing and displaying together. No spring records of **Wheatear** were received for the quarter.

Few records were received for **House Sparrow** and there were no counts of significance: a pair was nesting in the roof of a house in Quorn on 31 March. A group of 47 **Tree Sparrows** was noted in a hedge at Braunston-in-Rutland on 24 March whilst a party of 20 was on the feeders in the car park at Staunton Harold Reservoir on 29 January.

Records of **Grey Wagtail** came from just three sites with pairs noted Grace Dieu Wood and Quorn whilst a female was on the dam at Cropston Reservoir. The highest count of **Pied Wagtail** was a flock of 100 flying back and forth across the Old Grammar School at Market Harborough on 28 January. The only double-figure counts of **Meadow Pipit** came from Cropston when 17 were recorded on 3 February and at Beacon Hill when ten were there on 21 March.

Small numbers of **Chaffinch** were noted at ten sites with counts over ten at just three with maxima being 100 in a muddy field at Staunton Harold Reservoir, 30 in a hedge at Glooston and 12 in a Shepshed garden throughout the quarter. Yet another poor **Brambling** year with just one record received: 20 at Beacon Hill on 25 January. This is one of the best locations for finding Brambling and is well worth a journey during the winter months. There were no significant counts of **Greenfinch**, which were recorded from just six locations including four gardens. By far the largest count of **Goldfinches** was 125 at Stonton Wyville on 25 January. The



Lesser Redpoll © Jim Graham

only other counts in excess of 30 came from Church Hill, Birstall with 33 in the tops of Lime trees on 2 February and a minimum of 36 on feeders in a Cropston garden on 11 January.

No large wintering flocks of **Linnet** were noted, 11 feeding along the shore of Cropston Reservoir and 12 near Plungar ten days later, being the highest counts. Of the ten localities where **Lesser Redpoll** were recorded, four were member's gardens with ten birds regularly in an Easton garden between 28 February and the end of the quarter. Away from gardens, by far the highest count was 42 at Cropston Reservoir on 4 February with ten at Croft Pasture on the 24th and 16 at Shepshed Quarry South on 13 March the only other double-figure counts. The only records for **Crossbill** were two at Benscliffe Wood on 14 January and six at Shepshed Quarry south on 15 March with this latter party staying in the vicinity for over an hour. Small numbers of **Bullfinch** were noted at 14 widespread sites throughout the quarter. There were no three-figure counts of **Yellowhammer** for the quarter and 50 at Glebe Farm, Hallaton on 15 February and 30 at Stathern on 15 January were the only double-figure counts. Small numbers of **Reed Bunting** were noted at nine sites, none in excess of five. Song was being noted regularly after 10 March.

Jim Graham

Once again, our thanks go to Ken Goodrich who co-ordinated the bird records for this report.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Sightings for this group were almost non-existent during the last quarter of 2011, and so it was decided to hold back the report until the end of the first quarter of 2012.

Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis*: PD sent in a report of this species being seen regularly throughout the summer of 2011 in three gardens in Barrow Road, Quorn and she had a further sighting of two specimens in a Barrow Road neighbour's composting bin on 23 March of this year. It is reassuring to know that this reptile can still be found locally.

Smooth Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*: we have two sightings for this amphibian for the first quarter of this year, and both come from gardens. PMH reports finding three specimens in a garden pond at Markfield on 16 March, and PD reports finding two specimens under a tarpaulin in her garden in Quorn, on 20 March.

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*: sadly, we have virtually no sightings for this amphibian for the first quarter of this year. HS reports that neither frogs nor toads have spawned in her garden pond in Chaveney Road in Quorn this spring, although she did find four specimens of the Common Toad in Buddon Meadows in Quorn on 28 March.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*: as might be expected, we have a number of sightings for this amphibian for this quarter, in and around their spawning sites. The first sighting is from the beginning of the month: HB reports seeing several croaking males at Aylestone Meadows on 1 March. A week later, on 7 March, ATO reports find a specimen in his back garden in Loughborough, which he transferred to a neighbour's garden with a pond. On the same day, DAP reports finding spawn in a pond in the Mountsorrel Quarry off Cufflin Pits Lane, Mountsorrel. There were further sightings from a variety of sites from then on to the end of the month. PHG reports that he did not find any spawn at the usual site in the partially flooded moat in Buddon Brook Meadow at Quorn; however, the site was rapidly drying out by the end of the month. Conversely, DAP reports finding spawn in the Buddon Brook at Mill Farm in Quorn, on 14 March. PMH reports finding a



Smooth Newt © Jim Graham

dead specimen in her garden at Markfield on 10 March; however, a week later on 19 March, she had eight specimens busy spawning in her garden pond. Similarly, SFW reports finding specimens at two ponds on the Ulverscroft Nature Reserve on 11 March. Towards the end of the month, on 22nd and again on 26 March, PHG reports finding spawn in garden ponds on Warwick Avenue in Quorn. PD reports that at the same time, on 27 March, there was activity in her garden pond, in Barrow, and the first spawn appeared two days later on 29 March. Again, on 27 March, HB found an adult frog in the Willow Brook, at Thurnby Lodge and that concludes our sightings for the first quarter of 2012.

Tony Onions

FISH (including CRAYFISH)

White-clawed Crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*: DAP reports finding a large female White-clawed Crayfish, with a large cluster of eggs, in the Swithland Brook (which flows through his garden), on 2 December, while carrying out routine maintenance. At the same time he also disturbed several **Bullheads *Cottus gobio***, and several **Common Frogs**, hiding in leaf litter.

This is a particularly interesting report, because, as I am sure many of our members will be aware, the native White-clawed Crayfish has suffered an enormous decline in recent years, as a result of exposure to a fungal disease, which I believe was originally introduced from the Continent, and to which our only native crayfish has no resistance. Here in Leicestershire, it appears that the White-claw is now very much restricted to small streams and headwaters,

such as the top end of the River Eye above Melton, and the small streams on the top of Charnwood Forest, including, it would seem, the Swithland Brook.

Eurasian Minnow *Phoxinus phoxinus*: HB reports finding two or three shoals of these fish in the Willow Brook at Thurnby Lodge on 27 March. I am not familiar with this stream, but the Minnow is a fish, which likes clean, fast-flowing water, which is also neutral or slightly alkaline. Where it does find conditions to its liking it can form very large populations, and is a firm favourite of the Kingfisher.

I also have an unconfirmed report, once again courtesy of DAP, of a number of **Brown Trout *Salmo fario*** having been caught by an angler at Swithland Reservoir, during the last quarter of 2011. Apparently, there were seven fish in total, with the largest running to nearly a kilogram in weight. Given that the Reservoir is not stocked with trout, at first sight this seems a little odd. However, this is entirely consistent with the behaviour of the Brown Trout and, indeed, other salmonid fish. We know that at least one of the feeder streams of Swithland Reservoir – the Swithland Brook – contains Brown Trout, and it is entirely normal for these fish, as they grow larger, to drop back downstream in search of deeper water, and increased food supplies. Thus, it is not surprising that - with no obstacles to impede their passage – Brown Trout from Swithland Brook would move down into the Reservoir, and return to the stream only during the spawning period in the late Autumn.

While we are on the subject of fish turning up where one would not expect to find them, I have some interesting news with regard to the Canal at Loughborough. The first item concerns the **Zander *Stizostedion lucioperca*** (a.k.a. the Pike-Perch), which was not originally native to this Country, but was introduced from the Continent during the nineteenth Century. This species, along with one or two others, became the subject of renewed interest during the nineteen-seventies, and was introduced to several new waters, including, here in Leicestershire, the Ashby-de-la-Zouch Canal, and the River Soar. It appears that currently they are thriving in both the natural River and the Canal, here at Loughborough, although opinions

vary as to how large a size they have now reached. The Zander looks like a hybrid between the Perch and the Pike (hence the name “Pike-Perch”), but is actually a species in its own right, closely related to the Perch. (In any case the Pike and the Perch belong to completely unrelated families.) Zander are normally found in lakes or large lowland rivers with comparatively slow currents, where they swim in small groups - “pods” or “packs” - chasing shoals of smaller fish. They are photophobic, preferring low light intensities, and are apparently quite happy in turbid water. Although anglers in this Country normally return all so-called “coarse” fish to the water, the Zander, like other members of the Perch and Bass family, has a reputation for being excellent eating.

The second item of news concerns an even more exotic alien species: the **Sturgeon**. A couple of years ago, a small Sturgeon turned up during a fishing competition on the Ashby-de-la-Zouch Canal. As is the customary practice, this fish was returned to the water at the end of the competition, but not before someone had photographed it. I have seen a copy of this photograph, and although it is difficult to be certain, this fish appears to me to be a specimen of the **Sterlet *Acipenser ruthenus***. It seems that last year history decided to repeat itself, and during a fishing competition on the Canal on the north side of Loughborough, another small Sturgeon was caught. Apparently this one weighed 1.8 kg, and was also returned to the water. Unfortunately, I have not seen a photograph of this fish, so I cannot be certain which species it would have belonged to; although, in any case, identification of Sturgeon species can be difficult. The most likely guess is that it was another Sterlet. The Sterlet is not native to this Country: it is a wide-ranging species from northern and eastern Europe, found in the rivers of Arctic Russia, the rivers which drain into the eastern Baltic, and the rivers which drain into the Black Sea, including the Danube. It is an entirely freshwater species, living in large rivers and lakes, and migrating into shallower water to spawn. It has comparatively small eyes, and presumably has mediocre vision. It prefers a substrate of sand or silt and uses its four sensitive barbels to locate its food, which it can dig up, using its upturned bony snout. The mouth, which is located on the underside of the

snout, can be extended to form a tube, so that the fish can vacuum its food up out of the sand! The Sterlet is the smallest of the true Sturgeons, the *Acipenseridae*, but can reach a length of well over a metre, and a weight of over 7 kg. Small specimens are sometimes imported through the aquarium trade, and the problem is that they tend to outgrow the aquarium or the garden pond and end up being dumped by their owners. I have also come across another species in aquarium shops: the “Diamond” Sturgeon, so-called because of the diamond-shaped plates along the sides of the fish. It appears to be one of the “middle size” Sturgeon species, but I have no precise information as to which species this might be (possibly *Acipenser gueldenstaedti*?) – and in any case, it may well be a hybrid. A number of species have been farmed in Eastern Europe and Russia for many years now, and the Russians have experimented with various hybrids – Sturgeon will hybridize quite readily both in captivity and in the wild.

In contrast to the diminutive Sterlet, our single native species of Sturgeon, the Atlantic or **European Sturgeon *Acipenser sturio***, is one of the larger species, capable of reaching a length of over 3 metres, and weights of over 200 kilograms. It is an anadromous species, spawning in the middle reaches of large rivers, but spending most of its life in the sea. Like most species of Sturgeon it is slow-growing, but long-lived: they may not reach sexual maturity until they are twenty years old, and may well live (barring human interference!) to be over a hundred years old. Sadly, having suffered too much from human interference, the Atlantic Sturgeon is now a rare fish – it is now an endangered species, with the remaining population apparently restricted to the Garonne-Gironde River system in south-western France... And, unfortunately, it is not the only species of Sturgeon which is in trouble.

The true Sturgeons, the *Acipenseridae*, are part of a small group of fishes called the *Chondrostei*. There are approximately 26 species of the true Sturgeons, and if we add the allied species, we reach a grand total of 31 or 32 species, spread thinly around the northern hemisphere. From a biologist's perspective what is interesting about this group of fishes is that (at risk of oversimplifying things!) they can be

seen as a “missing link” between the so-called “primitive” fishes – the Sharks and the Rays – and the more “modern” Teleost (or bony) fishes, possessing characteristics from both groups. Thus they have a short, spiral intestine and a backbone of cartilage which extends into the top lobe of the tailfin, like the Sharks, but have a swimbladder and a bony gill plate (operculum) typical of the Teleosts - rather than the gill slits of the Shark. Needless to say, the Sturgeons are an ancient family, having remained virtually unchanged for probably more than 200 million years. Most species have considerable commercial value, but their life history, as with other migratory fishes, and the long period required to reach maturity, make them extremely vulnerable to overexploitation – and that is before we take into consideration environmental damage. The net result of these pressures is that – to the best of my knowledge – many if not most species of Sturgeon are in difficulty, if not seriously endangered. Speaking personally, I tend to regard the Sturgeons as the Sequoias of the ichthyological world: ancient, long-lived, and awe-inspiring; and I find it an extremely sad and sobering thought that some species of these fish, which saw the dinosaurs come and go, may as a result of human short-sightedness become extinct within our lifetimes.....

Tony Onions

BUTTERFLIES

Until March, no butterfly activity was reported by members and friends. Then some warm sunny weather resulted in some ten species being recorded.

Pieridae

During March the **Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*** was seen in FTS' s Barlestone garden and GF's Scraftoft garden on the 1st, followed by sightings in 15 additional widely spread localities between then and the end of the month, with four (three males; one female) noted by HB along Great Central Way, Leicester on the 22nd.

The Great Central Way also produced a **Small White *Pieris rapae*** on the 22nd and a **Large White *P. brassicae*** on 28th. Another

Small White was noted on the 23rd. The only **Green- veined White *P. napi*** reported was by FTS at Market Bosworth Park on the 23rd.

An early male **Orange -tip *Anthocharis cardamines*** was seen in our Quorn garden on the 27th and the following day, four active males were noted by HS in the Buddon Brook Meadows at Quom and, also on the 28th, three were seen by HB along Great Central Way.

Lycaenidae

A particularly early **Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*** was found resting on Bilberry on Timberwood Hill at the Charnwood Lodge National Nature Reserve by HS on 27 March but the Bilberry was not in leaf and the chances of the individual meeting up with any others of its own kind so early in the year would seem rather remote.



Green Hairstreak © Steve Woodward

Nymphalidae

Only two **Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*** were reported, one at Castle Gardens, Leicester, on 1 March and the other in a Warwick Avenue garden at Quom on the 23rd.

Three **Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*** were present in FTS's Barlestone garden on 1 March and between then and the 27th this attractive species was noted in eight scattered localities with a maximum of four noted by HB at Appleton Park, Leicester on the 26th.

The **Peacock *Inachis io*** whose numbers were worryingly low last summer was reported seen in some 15 well spread localities during March but mostly as singletons. A mating pair was noted in the Buddon Brook Meadows and three individuals at both Appleton Park and at Willowbrook Park were the largest numbers

recorded for single sites.

Finally, the **Comma *Polygonia c-album***, first noted in FTS's Barlestone garden and our Quorn garden on 11 March, was reported seen at a total of nine localities during the remainder of the month and a mating pair was observed in the Buddon Brook Meadows on the 28th.

Peter Gamble

MOTHS

There were hardly any promising nights until mid-February when, for a few days, the temperature rose into double figures during the day. Clouding up for the evenings and holding 8 and 9 °C and even just into double figures for an odd night, which for the moths (and other wildlife) must have felt positively tropical after weeks of freezing conditions. March continued in a similar trend but with cooler nights, some very cool! While there are not many species on the wing throughout these winter months (although there are some very special ones), it can still be quite exciting around a moth light on a favourable night. Many of these winter species can appear in considerable numbers and not least, to marvel, at the fact that these flimsy, fluttery things can survive anything that the elements throw at them just to get on with life as soon as conditions allow. HNB was greeted with a very nice reward from his Leicester Forest East garden on 22 March, the marvellous sight of a **Dotted Chestnut *Conistra rubiginea*** from the previous night, this constitutes the first record since the Victoria County History. Hot on his heels was MS when he amazingly recorded a second at Charnwood Lodge the night after.

Casual sightings

HS recorded a solitary **Orange Underwing *Archiearis parthenias*** at Charnwood Lodge on 27 March. GLF also recorded a single **Orange Underwing *Archiearis parthenias*** two days running on 27 and 28 March in a garden at Nanpantan.

Light trap results

PHG operated his mercury vapour light trap at home in Quorn on 12 March and recorded 28 moths of six species. They were a single ***Diurnea fagella***, four **Oak Beauty *Biston strataria***, seven of each **Small Quaker *Orthosia cruda*** and

Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi*. Hebrew Character ***Orthosia gothica*** and **Clouded Drab *Orthosia incerta*** came in at four and one respectively.

SFW did well to operate his Actinic light trap in his Groby garden on three nights this quarter. Singles of **Dotted Border *Agriopis marginaria*** and **Dark Chestnut *Conistra ligula*** both in February. Then a smattering of *Orthosia* species in March with a single **Early Grey *Xylocampa areola*** to add a little style.

Charnwood Forest Survey

Grace Dieu

From SFW and HI the continuing survey here provided a couple of micro moths, singles of ***Agonopterix arenella*** and ***Tortricodes alternella***, both in February. A solitary caterpillar of **Marbled Beauty *Cryphia domestica*** was found active on the ruins in March. The latter feed on lichens in particular the kind found growing on rocks. Which probably explains why this species is particularly regular at garden traps, with the larvae feeding off the lichens on roof tiles.

Ulverscroft Nature Reserve

Fox Covert was our first proper outing with the moth traps on 15 February and although we only recorded 47 moths of seven species, it was good to get the season under way. Highest number for a species was 33 **Pale Brindled Beauty *Phigalia pilosaria***, only two **Dotted Border *Agriopis marginaria*** and an assortment of early year species, all in single figures.



Dotted Border © Graham Finch

Beacon Hill

17 February, making the most of another mild night with just over 300 moths of seven species. 99 ***Tortricodes alternella***, 33 **March**

Moth *Alsophila aescularia*, 82 Pale Brindled Beauty *Phigalia pilosaria*, 75 Spring Usher *Agriopis leucophaearia*, a solitary Dotted Border *Agriopis marginaria*, four Satellite *Eupsilia transversa* and seven Chestnut *Conistra vaccinii* helped to make up the nights catch.

The Outwoods

23 February was a rewarding night with 429 moths of 12 species including an impressive 174 *Tortricodes alternella*. Some of the other species, out and about, were 72 March Moth *Alsophila aescularia*, a single Brindled Pug *Eupithecia abbreviate*, 97 Pale Brindled Beauty *Phigalia pilosaria* and 50 Spring Usher *Agriopis leucophaearia*.

Around the county

Bagworth Heath Woods

A visit to the Manor Wood area on 28 February gave us 94 moths of 13 species, only two species made it into double figures and they were 12 *Tortricodes alternella* and 49 Pale Brindled Beauty *Phigalia pilosaria*. New species for the year were two Clouded Drab *Orthosia incerta*, and then singles of Hebrew Character *Orthosia gothica* and Grey Shoulder-knot *Lithophane transversa*.

A second visit to the same area 30 March, although a full month later, produced only half of the previous total with just 40 moths of seven species. New species were Early Thorn *Selene dentaria*, Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi* and Twin-spotted Quaker *orthosia munda*. This is a



Twin-spotted Quaker © Graham Finch

huge area with quite varied habitat and I'm sure by the end of the year will have a quite respectable list.

Pickworth Great Wood

AR and MS did the obligatory mid-March *Orthosia* run at Pickworth and recorded nearly 4500 moths of 26 species. Just a few of the totals were 399 Yellow Horned *Achlya flavicornis*, plus an incredible 149 Small Brindled Beauty *Apocheima hispidaria*. That's probably the most of this species ever recorded at a single moth trapping session in the county. What is it about Pickworth that holds this amount of the latter species? A grand total of 2893 Small Quaker *Orthosia cruda* topped the numbers poll with Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi* well down at a mere 284.

Many thanks to all who have sent in their records for this quarter.

Graham and Anona Finch

OTHER INSECTS

The exceptional warm weather during the whole of March encouraged more activity among some species, especially the Hymenoptera.

Hemiptera

Only one record of the Green Shieldbug *Palomina prasina* was submitted, three of which were still in hibernating colours on Ivy in Beatty Avenue, Leicester on 10 January. Three Pied Shieldbug *Sehirus bicolor* were on low vegetation in Great Central Way on 28 March.

A couple of others mentioned were Honeysuckle Whitefly *Aleyrodes lonicerae* many flying around the quarry at Grace Dieu on 12 January and the Birch Catkin Bug *Kleidocerys resedae* at Ulverscroft NR on 11 March.

Diptera

The Dark-edged Bee-fly *Bombylius major* was well in evidence again in late March and was recorded from PHG's garden in Quorn from the 24th with several active on the 26th and frequent by the 29th. Others were seen with three around the shrubbery at Castle Gardens on the 25th, three in the margins of a small spinney Appleton Park on the 26th, two at



Birch Catkin Bug © Steve Woodward

Aylestone Meadows on the 28th, Woodhouse on the 25th and Browns Hill Quarry and Stonesby Quarry NR on the 29th, several at the latter nectaring on Ground Ivy, this appears to be a common nectar source in hedgerows.

Hoverflies

Very few records this quarter. A single **Marmalade Hoverfly** *Episyrphus balteatus* in my Leicester garden on 29 March and three **Eupeodes luniger** at Castle Gardens, Leicester on the 25th, the only other records were for the **Drone-fly** *Eristalis tenax*, several around *Mahonia* at Castle Gardens on 1 March, one at the same date at Quorn and frequent thereafter and a single *Eristalis pertinax* at Grace Dieu on the 25th. These few records are most probably of hibernating specimens.

Last year was a dreadful one for Hoverflies and the weather outside at the moment does not augur well for 2012 but we will see in the months ahead.

Hymenoptera

As usual for this quarter, the **Buff-tailed Bumblebee** *Bombus terrestris* is usually the most frequently seen. PHG again had the earliest records in his Quorn garden with workers from 14 January and small numbers during the rest of the month nectaring on Winter-flowering Honeysuckle with new queens present from 9 February and frequent during March. Other records during February came from Barlestone on the 23rd and frequent during March, mostly foraging on Pieris. A queen was seen briefly at Beatty Avenue on 10 January, foraging on Crocus at Castle Gardens on 3 March and Humberstone Park on the 6th and generally widespread after.

A few **Red-tailed Bumblebees** *Bombus lapidarius* queens were reported during March, from Humberstone Park, Great Central Way, Grace Dieu, Stonesby Quarry, Shenton Estate (several) and at Barlestone there were several during the latter half of the month and two with full pollen baskets on the 30th.

White-tailed Bumblebees *Bombus lucorum* were noted at Grace Dieu, Stonesby Quarry, Appleton Park, Willowbrook Park and Barlestone, where they were frequent during the latter half of the month, with a single pollen-covered queen on the 28th of March.

Early-nesting Bumblebees *Bombus pratorum* were rather thin on the ground, with just one queen noted in my city garden on March 23rd, the only other record coming from Barlestone where small numbers noted to the end of the month and single queens with pollen on the 24th to the 27th. MF informed me that she had only observed a couple during March in her wildlife garden, in Knighton whereas in 2011 she had three nesting.

The only **Garden Bumblebees** *Bombus hortorum* recorded were a single at Market Bosworth on March 22nd and two at Barlestone on March 27th.

The **Tree Bumblebee** *Bombus hypnorum* was visiting honeysuckle at Quorn on 26 February with numbers building during March and frequent by the end of the month. Other records for this species were from Barlestone, a single on Crocus on 23 February and further records from this site on 6 March and with pollen on the 21st and to the end of the month, mostly foraging on Pieris. Other single queens were recorded at De Montfort gardens on 6 March and Humberstone Park on 8 March, foraging on Crocus beds. Crocus flowers seem widely used by emerging queen bumblebees, especially *Bombus terrestris*, *Bombus hypnorum* and *Bombus lapidarius*.

Very few records this quarter of the **Common Carder Bee** *Bombus pascuorum* were submitted for this very common and widespread bee, a few queens on the Great Central Way on 28 March and a single at Barlestone on the 30th.

The cleptoparasite of *Bombus terrestris*, *Bombus vestalis*, was out of hibernation early with females at Barlestone on 24 March to the

27th, and a single on Great Central Way on the 28th.

Honey Bee *Apis mellifera* at Quorn recorded on 25 February foraging on Winter-flowering Honeysuckle and frequent on and off thereafter. Others recorded were several foraging Crocus at Humberstone Park on 6 March, one with full pollen baskets on Sallow at Willowbrook Park on the 27th and at Grace Dieu on 19 March.

A record not strictly from this quarter, is of a colony very active around a nest in a wall at Swithland on Boxing Day, a rather unusual nest site for this feral colony.

Solitary Bees

HI will normally write up the solitary bees and wasps but this quarter I shall include them here as records for this section are rather light.

Anthophora plumipes is the most successful solitary bee, especially in urban areas and the first male was observed on 15 March, which is about average with the first females on the 20th, the first record locally was at Beatty Avenue on 2 March, others were recorded at Great Central Way, Aylestone Meadows, Appleton Park and Willowbrook Park. At Waltham on the Wolds Post Office, ten were going into holes in a wall on 29 March, with ten males of its cuckoo bee ***Melecta albifrons***.



Melecta albifrons © Steve Woodward

The large, distinctive and early ***Andrena clarkella*** was widely recorded during late March particularly in the Charnwood area with records from Bradgate Park (very many males with only a few females), Grace Dieu, Morley Quarry NR, Newfield Colliery NR and Shenton Estate.

Andrena nitida another large bee not dissimilar to *A clarkella* was recorded at Newfield Colliery NR on 26 March. Other species from this group were ***Andrena minutula*** at Newfield Colliery and Shenton House, a small black species, widespread but easily overlooked. Another spring species, ***Andrena bicolor***, was at Shenton House and Great Central Way in late March.

The prettiest *Andrena*, the **Tawny Mining Bee *Andrena fulva*** was recorded in early March at Quorn where a male and two females were rescued from a garden bird bath on 3 March. In Appleton Park, Leicester a female was seen and there were males and females in Great Central Way, a female at Stonesby Quarry on the 29th and many males with a few females in Bradgate Park on the 28th and finally at Barlestone, males from the 25th, females on the 27th with 25 mounds by the 30th.

The small green ***Lasioglossum smeathmanellum*** was seen at Bradgate Park on 28 March and one in my garden on the 29th, a very early date and none seen since, no surprise considering the weather we have had since March.

The Cuckoo Bee ***Nomada leucophthalma***, a cleptoparasite of *Andrena clarkella*, was recorded in the same sites as its host at Bradgate Park, Grace Dieu, and the Shenton Estate in late March. The only other Nomad recorded was a male ***Nomada goodeniana*** at Shenton House, a widespread Nomad, a more eclectic species with several hosts.

A cleptoparasite of *Lasioglossum* species, ***Sphecodes ehippius*** was identified by HI at Stonesby Quarry on 29 March, a rather tricky group to identify without a good set of keys.

Coleoptera

As expected, we had few records this quarter and pride of place must go to the finding of a newly discovered colony of the **Green Tiger Beetle *Cicindela campestris*** by SFW at Newfield Colliery NR on 26 March, with over 25 counted. As far as I am aware this attractive beetle has only been recorded from Bradgate Park in the county over a great number of years.



Green Tiger Beetle © Steve Woodward

A fungus beetle *Triplax aenea*, many were found inside fungus at Grace Dieu on 26 February.

A couple of diving beetle records were received, *Hydroporus palustris* at Grace Dieu in shallow water with *Hydroporus incognitus* at the same site on 22 January.

Ladybirds

No prizes for guessing which was the most recorded ladybird this quarter. That was dominated by the **7-spot** *Coccinella septempunctata*. One in my garden on 7 January was the first record with numbers starting to build in February at Quorn and Markfield but it was in March when numbers exploded. On 2 March, in one small area at Beatty Avenue in the city, I counted 60 with over 100 at Quorn and Markfield by late March, in fact, it was almost impossible to look down at any roadside herbage without seeing them, there must have been several thousand in the county as a whole.

In contrast, only a single record of the **2-spot Ladybird** *Adelia bipunctata* which was spotted at Newfield Colliery on 26 March.

The only other record for this group was for the **Harlequin** *Harmonia axyridis* with about 50 clustered together at a window at Quorn on 8 January and a single in the garden on 25 February. This species appears slower to emerge with numbers increasing as the seasons progress.

Howard Bradshaw

FLOWERING PLANTS

October 2011 to March 2012

This report, short though it is, contains the records for the last two quarters. Very little happens during the autumn and winter months. In days gone by botanists could probably hibernate between November and February, however, over the last few years the weather patterns seem to have changed. This year it would appear we can get June weather in the winter and late Autumn weather in June so some plants seem to be a little confused and flower out of season or at least unseasonably earlier or later. What I find interesting is when you regularly visit a particular location you see how things grow over a period of time. In this situation, even the commonest plants become interesting in the way they develop.

Some Plants of Interest

Hazel *Corylus avellana*: Several bushes with fully developed catkins at Martin's Wood and Felicity's Wood, Woodhouse Eaves on 10 January.

Sweet Violet *Viola odorata*: a small colony was in flower near a hedgerow on the south side of Lower Marsh at Cossington Meadows.

Hairy Violet *Viola hirta*: Two plants were at St Mary de Castro church in Leicester. HB writes "Formerly characteristic of railway banks in last flora, now rare in such habitats."

Eastern Rocket *Sisymbrium orientale*: Several plants were in flower on the margins of car parks, etc., in Leicester city centre. This is a plant which at one time was common in Loughborough town centre but seems to have disappeared of late.

Primrose *Primula vulgaris*: Several plants were still in flower on 30 November 2011 in Quorn Village whilst a colony in the plantation west of the summit at Beacon Hill on 30 March was showing signs of spreading.

Cowslip *Primula veris*: mowing by the Council at the Meadow Car Park at Aylestone Mill Lock has allowed this species to spread in recent years.

New Zealand Pygmy Weed *Crassula helmsii*: several plants were found in the bottom of a dried out pond at Bradgate Park.

Dog Rose *Rosa canina* agg: found at Swithland Reservoir. PHG says "A single perfect flower was on briar overhanging boundary wall. A strange year indeed!"

Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*: At Grace Dieu, one plant with fresh leaves was located on rock on 19 January whilst one large plant on soil on the root plate of fallen tree on 26 February had many fresh leaves. This interesting little plant is virtually confined to Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire but nowhere is it common.

Annual Mercury *Mercurialis annua*: A number of plants were still flowering during November and December 2011 along Putney Road, Freemans Common in Leicester.

Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*: was present at Grace Dieu Wood.

Henbane *Hyoscyamus niger*: several were found by the ruins at Bradgate Park showing last year's fruiting stalks.

Winter Heliotrope *Petasites fragrans*: several plants were already in flower in a large roadside colony identified near Owston on 23 November 2011.

Narrow-leaved Water-plantain *Alisma lanceolatum*: a single plant was located on the riverside by the River Soar at Quorn.

Eric Webster

WEATHER

January was a very mixed month bringing us both gales and plenty of sunshine with rainfall below normal. Afternoon temperatures averaged 8°C, which is about 2°C warmer than usual but night-time temperatures were logged at 1.8°C, about 0.5°C below normal thanks to some cold nights in week three. The mean temperature of 5°C was 1°C above normal making it the warmest January since 2008. There was no significant cold spell during the month. It also ended up being drier than usual with 40 mm of rain falling at Mountsorrel which is about one third below the usual average figure of 60 mm. It was also a very windy month at times

with gusts reaching 60 mph at East Midlands Airport on the 5th.

The first week was very wet and windy with Atlantic low pressures bringing us gales but at least temperatures were very mild. The second week remained mild but it became mainly dry. Temperatures peaked at 12.5°C on the 11th and there was a remarkable amount of sunshine in the next fortnight. This helped January become the sunniest recorded in Leicestershire since 1836 with 85 hours of bright sunshine - nearly 50% above normal. The sunny days were accompanied in the third week by some cold nights with temperatures falling to -5°C on five consecutive nights with the lowest temperature of the month being recorded at -5.7°C on the 16th; this after a very sunny day when over seven hours of sunshine was recorded. The rain returned in the last week and then the winds turned to the east in the final days of the month, heralding the beginning of much colder weather as February arrived.

February was a month of two halves weather-wise being very cold and dry to start but much milder after mid-month. Average afternoon maximums were 7°C which was close to normal where night time temperatures registered 0.6°C about 1.3°C below normal. There were 12 night frosts recorded. The month began very cold as frigid air from Western Russia was drawn westwards by a huge area of high pressure. Between the 1st and the 11th, daytime temperatures stayed close to freezing. The 4th saw a fall of heavy snow as milder Atlantic air tried to come in from the west. Most places saw 10 cm and it caused some disruption. Night-time temperatures dropped to -10°C on the 11th in Mountsorrel and near Melton Mowbray they dropped to -15°C. Milder Atlantic air then arrived and the cold spell ended. The weather stayed mainly dry as high pressure dominated but its position this time to the SW meant much milder air flowed around it from the south-west. On the 23rd a remarkable 18.3°C was recorded at Mountsorrel, making it the warmest February day recorded here in Leicestershire. So, just 12 days after being at -15°C the temperature was 28°C higher at +18°C. This is the biggest range of temperature I have recorded in so short a time. Rainfall totals were very low at just 17 mm or just 35% of the usual

figure. Eighty hours of sun were recorded in the month which is the usual total.

March was the sunniest ever recorded in Leicestershire. It shone brightly for nearly 180 hours in March, which is 65 hours more than usual. High pressure dominated the month and this gave us the clear skies. The average afternoon temperature was 13°C, which was over 3°C above normal with the warmest day being recorded on the 28th at 21°C one of the warmest March days ever recorded. The mainly clear days also led to clear nights that in March are still quite lengthy and as a result, temperatures most nights slipped close to freezing while during the day they often came close to 20°C. The average temperature at night was 3°C, which is 1°C below normal. Five night frosts were also recorded. The mean temperature for the month was 8.1°C, about 1.5°C above normal, thanks to those warm spring-like days. The other main feature was once again the lack of rainfall. The close proximity of the high pressure meant that rain only fell on six days in the month and only once, on the 4th, when we had 11 mm, could it be called substantial. At Mountsorrel, my monthly total of just 20 mm was once again less than half the usual amount for March. So far this year I have recorded less than four inches of rain when I should expect nearly 8 inches. As the month ended the temperature began to drop but no rain fell after 17 March until the start of April.

Phil Morrish

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Records for the second quarter of 2012 should be sent to:

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

email: helen@canids.freeserve.co.uk
preferably by 15th July.