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ORCHIDS - SOME RECOLLECTIONS FOR 1968

Claude Henderson was a founder member of the Club and had a number of interests including beetles and orchids. While going through the old Club papers this article came to light. It will bring back pleasant memories for older members and those who did not know Claude may wish that they could have made his acquaintance.

People referred to in his article are Michael – Michael Walpole (interested in orchids and book collecting), Pat – Pat Candlish (later Evans), Peter – Peter Gamble, Miss Ayre – Kathryn Ayre – now Kathryn Ward.

The scientific names of some of the plants have changed since 1968 and it is difficult to put a modern name to some species, so they have been left as Claude wrote them.

My first recollection, orchid-wise for the current year was the photography of the **Early Purple Orchid** *Orchis mascula* during our Club's excursion to Owston Wood in May.

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Sunday 26 May

Pat, Peter and I had a try for the wild *Aquilegia* in a Derbyshire dale previously unvisited by us. High upon its flanks Peter located quite a population of the desired plant, though not in flower. Below these were patches of Lily of the Valley and below again, some scores of lovely **Yellow Mountain Pansy** *Viola lutea*. Interspersed through the whole were flowering groups of Early Purple Orchid – a scene of almost alpine richness.



Bee Orchid © Ralph Lockwood

Sunday 9 June

We visited an area on the Beds/Hunts border to try our luck for the **Burnt Orchid** *Orchis ustulata*. It is the daintiest thing imaginable and could be likened to a miniature edition of the **Kentish Lady Orchid** *Orchis purpurea*. We located some dozen flowering plants. Growing with them were two other plants that as general appearances want, you would consider “nothing to write home about” yet both exceedingly local plants of the chalk. They were the **Field Fleawort** and **Spotted Catsear**. The former resembles a single stemmed ragwort. The catsear is like a tall dandelion with grey-green leaves spotted with dark red. Near to this site was a beech wood, in it we found in numbers, in full bloom, the **Large White Helleborine** *Cephalanthera damasonium*.

Saturday 15 June

Saw us away at 4 am bound for the Gower Coast in Glamorganshire, the purpose of our quest being the var. *ovata* of the **Fen Orchid** *Liparis loeselii*. Yes, we found it, but only in one very restricted area, growing among moss and Dwarf Willow. What delighted us quite equally was the magnificent display of **Marsh Orchid** hybrids and colour forms. We were working along the edge of a series of dune-slacks with a marsh to our right hand. In full bloom in the marsh were thousands of **Yellow Flag Iris**, extending for a mile or so. Paralleling this on the dune-slack were hundreds of hybrids and local colour forms of the two species of Marsh Orchid – *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and *Dactylorhiza incarnata*. Perhaps by now we are getting a little blasé where the British orchids are concerned but this display left us gasping. One particular hybrid was so huge, that had you seen it, say as a potted plant, you would have said “no, this is not British”. As we worked we kept disturbing a small moth that is very local in Britain in maritime situations – the **Silver Hook**. We had lunch on a cliff edge overlooking a fine example of a raised beach – we could kick ourselves now for not photographing it. Fulmars were flying at our feet.

Saturday 22 June

This was the day of the Club’s outing to Wicken Fen and the Suffolk Brecklands. Peter and I elected to stay at Wicken. Here we

photographed the very fine var. *albida* of the **Early Marsh Orchid**. The only other known British stations for this form being the New Forest and ‘near Southampton’. We also located a dyke in which the **Greater Bladderwort** *Utricularia vulgaris* was blooming to perfection. This is a lovely wild flower, deep yellow and quite large. As I recall it we arrived home at about 8 pm. The day though was not quite finished because at 10.30 pm Michael arrived to impart some stunning news. Here though, I must digress for a moment – some two years ago, a rumour reached our ears that a **Lizard Orchid** *Himantoglossum hircinum* had bloomed on a farmer’s ground in East Anglia. Was he on the phone? He was. So Michael gives him a tinkle on the old blower – yes, he was most cooperative. He assured Michael the “should it occur again in any subsequent year, I will certainly give you a ring”. Well, this was the explanation of Michael’s late Saturday night arrival – the promised call had just come through – whoopee!

We were actually knocking at the farmer’s door at 8 o’clock the next morning. His greeting was most affable. We found him to be a botanist in his own right, complete with a large botanical library and a garden filled with wild treasures grown from seed collected over the years by him. So, with coffee cup in hand and two chocolate biscuits delicately balanced on the rim, we first did a grand tour of the library. If you are thinking “just up Michael’s street” - you are quite mistaken. In any other circumstances I will grant you – yes! After half an hour of what at any other time would have been paradise, we found ourselves glancing at each other wanting to say “yes, but what about the Lizard Orchid?” “Mr Henderson, do have another cup of coffee” “when you have finished we can do a tour of the wild garden”--- Holy Smoke! –it could start raining at any moment!

We got there at last. There they were – four of them! Eh? Oh, smelling salts soon brought us round. Yes, four of them. Well, after we’d got up off our knees, we did our photography. You know seeing one’s first ‘Lizzie’ is considered the PhD of this game – it entitles one to assume a somewhat patronising mien to others less fortunate – as you will notice when next we meet you.

Sunday 30 June

In company with Club member Miss Ayre and friends, the Craven limestone of W. Yorkshire was our venue. The object of search being the **Small White Orchid *Gymnadenia albida***. We did not succeed in finding it, although we searched quite hard. Had I, prior to going, perused the botanical atlas, I would have seen that records for the years after 1930 were very few indeed – it is of course really a Scottish orchid. I would like to have another try for this species – I have got ideas! We did see for the first time, in the interstices of the limestone pavement, a very local plant that is almost confined to such a habitat – the **Baneberry** (Herb Christopher). We also saw the **Green Ribbed Spleenwort** in quantity. We encountered in the district, two Yorkshire naturalists and they knew Britain's orchids well. They told us that earlier in the year they had seen a Yorkshire fellside literally covered with thousands of **Burnt Orchids** – an occurrence I should think almost unique in these islands! I did manage to photograph the pure white form of the **Fragrant Orchid**.

Wednesday 10 July

On this day my wife and I started a fortnight's holiday in Guernsey. May I say how much we enjoyed the sea passage of eighty miles from Weymouth. To see the islands lifting from the haze of the southern horizon was wonderful. As you can guess, I was transported – these were the outliers of the Solomon Group – Birds of Paradise! Outrigger canoes! – Yellow Jack! – Cannibals! Yes, I had got the breach mechanism of my Magnum Express nicely oiled, thank you. The “seagulls” passing in our wake were Gannets *en route* to Alderney. On our first full day in the island, we found ourselves by the merest chance (don't look at me like that) near to the principal location for the **Jersey Orchid *Orchis laxiflora***. This orchid blooms in May, so I had to find it out of bloom – in a dense red swamp. At the first try I only managed to find one plant. On the second, some days later, I seemed to get the hang of it and found it in small numbers – one plant still holding a few flowers. Of the very rare **Summer Lady's Tresses *Spiranthes aestivalis*** I could see no sign. I was later informed by the island's botanists that the species had not been seen on either Jersey or Guernsey during this century. I tried to upset

this statement but failed. Some of the coastal commons are fascinating places for the naturalist as each has its own character. That group of plants known as the Broomrapes - they are parasitic – are very infrequent on the British mainland, here though on these commons, they abound. I certainly saw four species, perhaps five.

Saturday 27 July

On this day Peter was returning from holiday. Michael and I decided to go it alone at Newborough Warren on Anglesey. We started at 4 am and arrived at 8 am. On handing our credentials to the resident warden we were told that, owing to a present fire hazard, certain portions were now out of bounds. This meant that the area of our choice could not be approached directly. The alternative route being via the coast. This we tried. As there was a mile to go and the sand was fine as flour, we took to the sea. So it was off with the shoes and socks and other sundry accoutrements. Unfortunately, projecting into the sea at regular intervals were long tongues of pebbles. I don't know whether you've ever walked over pebbles in your bare feet? – ugh – the agony and the ecstasy!

We did finally reach the desired area and a wonderful place it was, for some time though try as we may, we could not find our desired orchids, then, as so often happens, we found them all together in an acre or so of ground. There were several groups and single plants of the very local **Dune Helleborine *Epipactis dunensis***, several large patches of the beautiful **Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustre***, many plants of the **Northern Dwarf Purple Orchid *D. purpurella***. Present too were the **Heath Spotted Orchid** and the **Common Spotted Orchid** and the hybrids between the last two and the Dwarf Purple Orchid. Scattered through the whole assembly were scores of the lovely ***Pyrola rotundifolia* Round-leaved Wintergreen** in full flower – absolutely classic!

The exploration and photography in this area, plus the return along the beach, had taken three hours or so and due to the heat we were very thirsty. Rather foolishly perhaps we decided to have a drink of our wine - on empty stomachs! Well in five minutes we were both “in our cups”

– bereft of all strength below the knees. After an hour or so the effects had eased a bit and we decided to have ago for the var. *densiflora* of the **Fragrant Orchid** in the huge dune area to the east. We parked the car and took our bearings, we then climbed ridge after ridge of dunes and explored the intervening slacks. After some two hours in this “No Man’s Land” and having seen no sign of our quarry we decided to call it a day and return to the car. Yes, as easily as that. We dragged ourselves up the nearest dune to locate our bearings. We couldn’t see them! We were too far away. Michael thought the car was thataways and I thought it was thisaways. We compromised. After about another thousand miles of dune climbing we didn’t seem to be getting anywhere – we were lost! The heat! Our thirst! Bones lying in the sand would have occasioned little surprise. Even the seagulls sitting on the dunes could so easily have been vultures – just waiting – to add our bones to the charnel heap.

Eventually we managed to get a sighting of the car’s approximate position – three quarters of a mile away! More dunes to be climbed and you know Michael is quite a weight pic-a back. At long last a palsied arm with twitching fingers at its end was able to reach up from the ground and manipulate the door catch. No, not the front door – the boot – there were two bottles of beer inside.

Our route home on the M5 took us through a portion of Snowdonia. We called in at an hotel and Michael stood treat for evening dinner – with all the trimmings. Little did the other diners know that we hadn’t even got our socks on. The dinner helped to restore the missing calories but our thirsts were still insatiable.

Actual this day had been one of the highlights of our ‘orchid career’ – absolutely fab!

Sunday morning August 4th

This day Michael and I had the audacity to make an attempt on Britain’s rarest plant – The **Ghost orchid** *Epipogium aphyllum*. The English name is very appropriate as everything about the plant seems purposely to conspire to making the finding of the plant next to impossible. Indeed, up to a few years ago only some ten specimens were known as British. First it can exist for several years in a completely

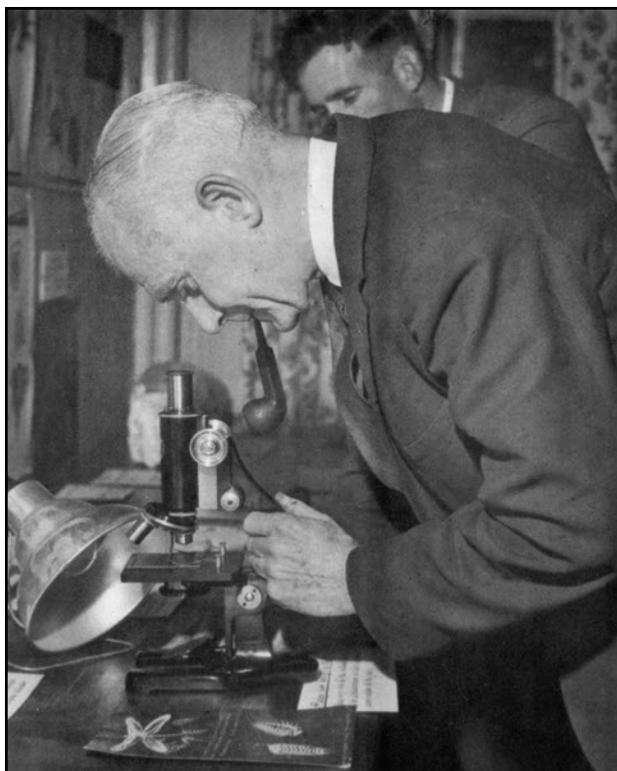
subterranean condition. Second, unlike most flowering plants it just doesn’t have a flowering period as such – it flowers any time between May and late August – depending on its caprice of the moment. Third, if and when it flowers – they are the most fleeting of all. Well, this is the plant that we set out to investigate and if you are thinking that I’ve some marvellous success story on hand – forget it. Oh, we made progress and eventually we will photograph it. We tackled the problem in the huge beech woods of the Chilterns. By one of those quirks of chance we thought we had found a seeding plant immediately on getting out of the car, in fact we took a bit of convincing otherwise – I being the principal erring party. The plant in question turned out to be a seeding Yellow Bird’s Nest behaving in as manner we thought not typical! Further search did not turn up the plant but during it we found some fine examples of **Green-lipped Helleborine** *Epipactis leptochila*. When we were about to return to the car we encountered a botanist and his son actually searching for the Ghost Orchid! He gave us several tips. We trod on ground where it was really growing – but in its subterranean state. But next year – wow! Did you know that some of the Australian orchids actually bloom underground? – You didn’t? No, I though perhaps you didn’t.

C W Henderson

British Orchids: Seen and Photographed in the Field

Marsh Helleborine and var. ochroleuca of Marsh
Helleborine
Dune Helleborine
Violet Helleborine
Pendulous Helleborine
Lesser Twayblade
Autumn Lady’s Tresses
Irish Lady’s Tresses – Mrs Candlish
Fen Orchid var. create
Lesser Butterfly Orchid
Musk Orchid
Pyramidal Orchid
Man Orchid
Soldier Orchid
Burnt Orchid
Early Purple Orchid

Heath Spotted Orchid
 Late Marsh Orchid
 Early Spider Orchid
 Bee Orchid and var. trolii of Bee Orchid
 Common Twayblade and var. platiglossa of
 Common Twayblade
 Broad-leaved Helleborine
 Dark Red Helleborine
 Green-lipped Helleborine
 Large White Helleborine
 Bird's Nest Orchid
 Creeping Lady's Tresses
 Bog Orchid
 Fragrant Orchid
 Greater Butterfly Orchid
 Jersey Orchid
 Lizard Orchid
 Monkey Orchid
 Lady Orchid
 Green-veined
 Common Spotted Orchid and var. hebridensis
 of Common Spotted Orchid – Mrs Candlish
 Early Marsh Orchid
 Dwarf Purple Orchid
 Fly Orchid
 plus several hybrids



Claude Henderson

CLASSIFIED RECORDS

Details of records from which Heritage is compiled are copied (as electronic lists or scans of paper records) to the Leicestershire & Rutland Environmental Record Centre, County Hall. They are freely available to members wishing to view record details. Non-members should apply to the Club Secretary for permission to consult them.

The original paper records are temporarily in the care of members until a more secure archive can be established.

MAMMALS

Hedgehog droppings were seen on her Quorn garden path by PJD on 27 March.

Molehills were recorded from The Outwoods, Swithland Reservoir Waterworks grounds, Bradgate Park, Swithland, Elmesthorpe, Little Dalby, Gilmorton, Normanton Turville, Holwell Mouth, Saltby, Sproxton, Atterton, Witherley, Ratby, Ridlington, Ullesthorpe, Barwell, Glooston, Walton, Burton on the Wolds, Bawdon Lodge, Thurlaston and Stapleton.

Single **Brown Hares** were seen at Clipsham in February and near Bittesby in March and lying low in a meadow between Eye Brook and Stockerston in late March.

Rabbits were seen at Swithland throughout the quarter in DAP's garden and paddock. A dead one was seen at Gilmorton and Rabbit signs were noted on a golf course at Wilson, Thurlaston, Saltby Airfield at Sproxton, Witherley, Ridlington, Barwell, Goadby, and Bawdon Lodge.

Grey Squirrels were noted in Gilmorton, Bagworth, Bittesby and Hinckley – St Mary's churchyard where they were approaching people as if expecting to be fed. A teashop/cafe that we visited near Old Dalby had won an award for the best Squirrel Pies in a pie making competition.

A **Wood Mouse** had been visiting DAP's bird feeder in Swithland.

PHG has had frequent visits from **Red Fox** to his Quorn garden and on 29 January a fine large fox trotted down his path at 1 pm and jumped

BIRDS

over the wall into Kayes Plantation. EPT had a healthy looking vixen in his Loughborough garden on 17 January and 10 March and saw one crossing Paudy Lane near Six Hills on 15 February. A large male was observed in DAP's Swithland garden on a number of occasions and droppings, thought to be boundary markers, were found.



Badger © Jim Graham

Dead **Badgers** were noted at Birstall, Woodhouse, a young one in Park Road, Loughborough and two on the A6 near Rothley. DAP has regular visits from Badgers to his Swithland garden even though they must cross the stream to get in. There was a dead youngster at Bruntingthorpe and signs of Badgers (hair – usually on barbed wire, setts, latrine pits or the distinctive five toed footprints) were noted at Holwell Mouth, Witherley, Martinshaw Wood, Ridlington, Barwell, Stapleton, Glooston, Walton, Bruntingthorpe and Belvoir Castle grounds.

PHG heard from Dale Osbourne, Senior Warden at Watermead, that an **Otter** with young has been seen in Watermead Park by several lucky bird watchers.

Muntjac were spotted in February in Newtown Linford at 9.30 pm and Coston at 2.30 pm. Near Puddledyke at 3 pm in January and near Rabbit's Bridge in mid-March, at Ridlington in February and the tiny slots were noted at Holwell Mouth and Bawdon Lodge.

Helen Ikin

Recorded from seven main waters double-figure counts of **Mute Swans** occurred at Swithland Reservoir and Watermead CP with maxima of 66 and 47 respectively and by mid-March pairs were nesting on at least six.

One or two **Pink-footed Goose** were in the Soar Valley area during the first two weeks of February and 11 were noted in flight over Swithland Reservoir on the 28th. A single **White-fronted Goose** was also in the Soar Valley often in the company of the Pink-footed. Strangely, there were no counts of **Greylag Goose** and the highest count of **Canada Goose** was 40 at Watermead CP in both February and March, whilst a single **Egyptian Goose** was roaming the Soar Valley in January and February.

A lone **Shelduck** was seen in Birstall and Wanlip Meadows in January whilst small numbers of **Mandarin Duck** were seen at four sites usually in pairs. As is usual, the best counts of wintering **Wigeon** came from Watermead CP North peaking at 415 on 13 March. The only other three-figure count was 112 at Swithland Reservoir on 17 January. The two later sites also held the best numbers of **Gadwall** with 107 and 96 respectively. Pairs were noted at six sites from mid-February onwards. Swithland Reservoir proved to be the stronghold for **Teal** with 262 noted on 17 January. Counts of circa 80 made at Watermead CP North and Wanlip Meadows were probably of the same mobile flock. **Mallard** were widespread and two members had them on their garden ponds. The best counts were 172 at Watermead CP North on 21 February and 115 at Swithland Res on 17 January. A female on a nest with 5 eggs was noted at Walton on 20 March. A total of 66 **Shoveler** at Watermead CP North on 3 March was almost half of last year's highest count and low numbers overall were commented on by PHG. A pair of **Red-crested Pochard** was noted at Watermead CP North on 13 March, with a leucistic female in the south section of the park two weeks earlier. Cropston Reservoir held the largest number of **Pochard** with at least 65 noted during February and March plus a maximum of 22 at Swithland Reservoir on 21 February. The best counts of **Tufted Duck** came from Swithland Reservoir with counts in excess

of 200 in all three months of the period peaking at 277 on 13 March, and 226 at Watermead CP North on 21 February. Double-figure counts came from three other waters. The first-winter female **Scaup** was at Swithland Reservoir throughout the first quarter whilst an adult drake was at Cropston Reservoir from 21 February until 6 March. Other than one individual at Watermead CP North on 21 February, all other counts of **Goldeneye** came from Swithland Reservoir peaking at about 50 during both January and March.

Most reports of **Goosander** were from the Soar Valley complex with a maximum of 33 noted at Wanlip Meadows on 12 February. Single males were found at Longmoor Lake on 31 January and Albert Village Lake on 4 February.



Red-legged Partridge © Jim Graham

There were few records received for **Red-legged Partridge** but a pair frequented JG's Cropston garden during most of March and the only reports of **Grey Partridge** were six at Barkestone on 27 January and five at Ravenstone on 11 February.

Double-figure counts of **Cormorant** came from Watermead CP and Cropston Reservoir with maxima of 36 and ten respectively, both on 13 March. There was no comment relating to potential breeding.

Little Egret records came from just six sites, most of one or two. Small numbers of **Grey Heron** were noted at the usual waters with 30 at Watermead CP North on 21 February the only double-figure count.

Little Grebes were noted at six sites in small numbers however, Albert Village Lake had double-figure counts with a maximum of 21 on 17 January. Most **Great Crested Grebe** records came from Cropston Reservoir with the largest

count being just 37 on 18 January well down on 63 recorded in February 2015. A number of displaying pairs were noted from 6 March onwards.

Red Kite was widespread in all three months, mainly one or two although 25 roosting around Knipton Reservoir on 27 January was exceptional. A ring-tail Hen Harrier at Ravenstone was an excellent find lingering from 30 January to 14 February. Single **Sparrowhawk** were noted at 17 diverse locations including five member's gardens. **Buzzard** records came from 33 widespread locations, with pairs displaying at a minimum of 11 sites during March. **Kestrel** was recorded at 21 locations mostly found hunting by roadsides. One or two **Peregrine** were at their usual sites but the majority of records came from Leicester city centre where a pair were regularly located on Leicester Cathedral during February and March. A nesting platform was erected here in a collaborative project between LROS and Leicester City Council in the hope that the birds can have a safe place to nest in future years.

Single **Water Rail** were located at Watermead CP North, Cossington Meadows and Albert Village Lake. Double-figure counts of **Moorhen** came from three sites with maxima being: 21 at Watermead CP North on 13 March, 19 at Albert Village Lake on 17 January and 11 at Swithland Reservoir 21 February. The only three-figure count of **Coot** was 117 at the same site on the same date with double-figures from Albert Village Lake, 76 on 17 January, and 70 at Watermead CP North on 21 February.

The first **Oystercatcher** was located at Longmoor Lake on 2 February and at four others by the end of the month. The best count was six at Watermead CP North on 13 March. The only **Golden Plover** noted were 20 at Wanlip Meadows on 1 January. A three-figure flock of **Lapwing** was in the Soar Valley during February peaking at 463 on the 21st. Double-figure counts came from three other locations. Small numbers of **Snipe** were at four sites, the highest count being 15 at Sence Valley on 6 January. What must surely have been the find of the quarter, a **Long-billed Dowitcher**, was originally located at Wanlip Meadows on 6 February and, although mobile, remained in the area until the 22nd being relocated at Rutland Water the following

day. The only **Woodcock** of the period was found at Bradgate Park on 27 March. **Green Sandpiper** were at three sites with six at Wanlip North on 9 February the highest count.

There were two reports of **Kittiwake**, both of adults, singles at Groby Pool on 1 February and Cropston Reservoir on 9 March. The later site held by far the largest count of **Black-headed Gull** with a minimum of 5,000 loafing on 24 January. Around 1,500 were at Albert Village Lake on the 17th and 2,000 were at Watermead CP South on 28 February. What was probably the same adult **Mediterranean Gull** in winter plumage was originally located at Groby Pool on 23 January, Cropston Reservoir the following day and a recycling plant in Braunstone Frith on the 26th. The only significant count of **Common Gull** was 53 at Albert Village Lake on 17 January. The same site held the highest count of **Lesser Black-backed Gull** with 450 on 21 February. A minimum of 100 at Cropston Reservoir on 24 January was the only three-figure count. Small numbers of Herring Gull were at three sites with **Yellow-legged Gull** at two. One or two **Caspian Gull** were at Albert Village Lake during January and February and a single was at Cropston Reservoir on 17 January. A juvenile **Iceland Gull** was found at Albert Village Lake on 5 February with an adult there on the 12th, whilst a second-winter plumaged individual was at Watermead CP South on the 28th. A juvenile **Glaucous Gull** visited three sites between 18 January and 12 February: Albert Village Lake, Groby Pool and Braunstone Frith. The only **Great Black-backed Gull** were found at Albert Village Lake peaking at 16 on 17 January.

One or two **Stock Dove** were noted at five locations with one observer commenting that they were “rather scarce at the moment” and questioning whether they were in “local decline”. The only significant count of **Wood Pigeon** was 500 heading towards Bradgate Park on 15 February. There were few **Collared Dove** records received and 20 at Stonton Wyville on 21 February was the best count.

One or two **Barn Owl** were reported from four sites, whilst at least four **Little Owl** were at Bradgate Park in January with two at Scalford on the 8th. Calling **Tawny Owl** were heard at five sites through the quarter. Up to three

Short-eared Owl were at Cossington Meadows throughout the quarter.

Single **Kingfisher** were recorded from five sites. Reports of **Green Woodpeckers** came from seven locations whilst **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** were at 14, including three gardens, with drumming birds or pairs reported from eight sites.

Two pairs of **Magpie** in ATO's Loughborough garden were “getting ready to nest” at the end of January. **Jay** was reported from just four localities. At least 1,000 **Jackdaw** went to roost at Watermead CP North on 11 February. Three-figure groups can often be seen heading in that direction at dusk during the winter. In contrast, the highest count of **Rook** was just around 100 at Kirkby Mallory on 7 March. A total of 57 active nests were located by SFW and HI in their search of three Rookeries. A high count of just five **Carrion Crow** during the period shows just how under-recorded this species is, whereas one or two **Raven** were well reported from 18 sites with display observed at six.

Records of **Goldcrests** were mainly of one or two and came from eight locations. There were no significant counts of **Blue, Great or Coal Tits**, and as usual, the only reliable site for **Willow Tit** was Kelham Bridge where at least two were seen through the quarter. Single **Marsh Tit** were found at three sites.

The only **Sky Lark** flock of note was 14 in fields off Causeway Lane with at least eight in song on 28 January. Singing was heard from a further six sites. Hirundines just made it into the quarter with two **Sand Martin** at Swithland Reservoir on 31 March in the company of two **Swallow**. A further two of the later were at Birstall Meadows the same day.

Cetti's Warbler was heard from 26 January in the Watermead CP complex and involved a total of a minimum of 12 birds. It would appear that **Long-tailed Tit** have recovered after last winter's poor showing with records from six sites including six at Groby Pool on 13 February.

Overwintering **Chiffchaff** were noted throughout the quarter with returning migrants heard singing from 27 March onwards. All wintering **Blackcaps** reported were of one or two and came from seven gardens, with a male in EPT's noted from 28 January until 24 March.

You may recall reading the leading article in Heritage 217, of a **Nuthatch** caught in a mist net in PHG's garden on 22 March 2015. This was first ringed by Ian Gamble on 31 December 2005, making this the oldest known Nuthatch recorded in Britain. Well, this was once again re-trapped on 19 March this year making it at least ten years and two months since the original ringing. Singles came from a further seven locations including three gardens. One was noted nesting in a wall in St Mary's churchyard Hinckley on 31 March. **Treecreeper** was noted at five localities with song heard from 26 February. Most **Wren** records were of singles but nine were in full song at Cropston Reservoir on 13 March.



Treecreeper © Jim Graham

The best count of **Starling** was 400 feeding near pigsties on Saltby Airfield on 14 February. Most **Blackbirds** records came from gardens, mainly of ten or fewer but at least 14 were feeding on mealworms in JG's Cropston garden. Flocks of wintering thrushes were once again poor in number with maxima being 60 for both **Fieldfare** and **Redwing** at Cossington on 20 January and Cropston Reservoir on 6 March respectively. **Song Thrush** was noted at eight locations with singing at four, whilst records of **Mistle Thrush** came from seven.

Cropston Reservoir had 12 **Robin** in song on 13 March with seven **Dunnock** at the same site. A "superb" male **Black Redstart** was found amongst farm buildings at Lount on 18 March. Both Bradgate Park and QE2 Wood, Ravenstone had male **Stonechat** during January with the later remaining until 14 February.

There were few records for **House Sparrow** but 100 were found at Stonton Wyville through February and around 50 were in ACR's

Loughborough garden during the quarter and Beedles Lake Golf Course on 2 January, whilst pairs of **Tree Sparrow** were recorded at Burrough Hill CP and Botany Bay Fox Covert.

Unsurprisingly, all **Grey Wagtail** locations involved water, five of which held one or two individuals. There was no indication of any wintering flocks of **Pied Wagtail** from any of the usual sites during the period and the only record of **Meadow Pipit** was 6 at Bradgate Park on 25 February.

There was no double-figure counts of **Chaffinch** but in contrast 11 **Brambling** were found at Lount on 15 March, ten at Grimston on 24 January with singles in two members' gardens. All **Greenfinch** records came from gardens with 23 in JG's at Cropston the highest count where there was also a minimum of 40 **Goldfinch**.

Flocks of **Siskin** were ten or fewer with 20 at Watermead CP North, 24 in JG's Cropston garden (with two singing in March) possible part of the 34 at the nearby Cropston Reservoir noted on 6 March.



Siskin © Jim Graham

All **Lesser Redpoll** records came from three gardens with the largest count being nine in EPT's on 9 March. There were just two double-figure counts of **Linnet** 15 at Ravenstone on 11 February and 40 at Lount on 15 March. Small numbers of **Bullfinch** were noted at just seven sites whilst **Yellowhammer** records came from six with by far the largest count being 200 at Stonton Wyville on 14 February. Single **Reed Bunting** records came from only two sites.

Jim Graham

REPTILES and AMPHIBIANS

This report covers the fourth quarter of 2015 and the first quarter of 2016:

As might be expected we have virtually no sightings of reptiles and amphibians during these two quarters of the year; at this time reptiles and amphibians tend to hide away and await the return of warmer weather. If we do catch sight of an amphibian at this time of the year it tends to be as a result of disturbing one while working in the garden! Amphibians tend to reappear towards the end of the first quarter, in March, as they make their way to their spawning sites. And so, not surprisingly, our sightings this time round fit very much into this pattern, as we shall see.

Common or Smooth Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*: PJD reports finding a tiny specimen under a rock in her Quorn garden on 19 October. We have no further sightings until 14 March of this year, when PJD reports finding at least eight specimens in her next door neighbour's pond in Quorn. Some days later, on 27 March, DAP reports finding a specimen in a garden pond in Swithland. No doubt we shall have further sightings as the weather continues to warm up.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*: It seems that the unusually warm weather in February brought these amphibians out quite early this year. Our first sighting comes from PJD in Quorn, who found frog spawn in her garden pond on 23 February. She notes that this is the earliest date she has ever recorded this event. After this, things were quiet for some days until 7 March, when there was renewed activity. On that day, PJD recorded 12 frogs in her garden pond. PHG found several specimens at two ponds in Warwick Avenue in Quorn, on 29 February. He found his first clump of spawn at this site on 17 March. Three days later, on 20 March, there was more activity at the site and he counted approximately eight clumps of spawn. By 25 March there was even more activity at the site and over 20 clumps of spawn. PHG notes that the frequent night frosts during March kept halting the breeding activity. HS, also in Quorn, reports finding three clumps of spawn in her garden pond on 23 March. Two days later, on 25 March, HI and SFW found two clumps of spawn in a pond in Bradgate Park.

FISH (including CRAYFISH)

This report again covers the fourth quarter of 2015 and the first quarter of 2016:

Following his visit to the "Shelthorpe Top Pond" at the end of September, ATO decided to revisit this pond a few days later on 8 October. This pond is situated next to the roundabout on Epinal Way at the junction of the Woodthorpe Road. For those not familiar with it, it was made when the new road was constructed, presumably to help to alleviate flooding. It has become 'naturalised' very quickly and provides a home for a wide variety of wildlife, including fish. However, this pond is very shallow – no more than a metre deep – and so it will cool down very quickly in the autumn and fish activity will tend to be curtailed until warmer weather returns. During that afternoon at the pond ATO obtained seven specimens of the **Rudd *Scardinius erythrophthalmus***, ranging in length from 11 to 17 cm. He also obtained 13 specimens of the **Perch *Perca fluviatilis***, ranging in length from 10 to 18 cm. ATO also observed a **Goldfish *Carassius auratus*** in the pond. Although his view of this fish was restricted it appeared to be a light orange specimen of standard shape, and approximately 20 cm in length. The sighting of this fish did not really come as a surprise, since ATO had been told on previous visits to the pond that people from the local housing estate had released a variety of fish into the pond!

On 31 March 2016, ATO visited a section of the Loughborough Canal, near the so-called Swingbridge, off the Derby Road in Loughborough. At this point the canal is relatively wide, and about a metre and a half deep. According to local angling sources, this section of the canal had recently been restocked with a variety of fish species by the Environment Agency. During the course of the visit he obtained a variety of species: three **Roach *Rutilus rutilus***, 10 to 14 centimetres in length, five **Perch *Perca fluviatilis***, 10 to 14 cm in length, and also three individual specimens: one **Rudd *Scardinius erythrophthalmus*** (15 cm), one **Bronze or Common Bream *Abramis brama*** (27 cm), and one **Dace *Leuciscus leuciscus*** (16 cm). Canals are usually regarded as being still-waters; and one would not normally expect to

find a Dace in this sort of environment. However, the Loughborough Canal is connected to the River Soar, forming a series of 'by-passe', and consequently fast-water species like the Dace do occasionally find their way into the Canal sections, especially in times of flooding.

While he was there ATO also observed another **Goldfish** *Carassius auratus*. This time it was a dark orange fish, of the 'Comet' variety. (The Comet has a standard body shape but with an enlarged tail fin.) All of the specimens obtained appeared to be healthy, which argues that these days the water quality in the canal must be relatively good.

This concludes our sightings for the last two quarters. I hope that now the weather is improving we shall have more reports !

Tony Onions

Notes on the Life History of the Goldfish *Carassius auratus*:

There are two species of fish belonging to the Carp family which are closely related: Crucian Carp *Carassius carassius* and Gibel or 'Prussian' Carp *Carassius auratus gibelio*. These two species occupy similar habitats: that is, slow-flowing lowland rivers and still-waters. They also share some common characteristics: they are remarkably hardy and can endure low winter temperatures, some pollution, and oxygen deficiency; and thus they thrive in shallow, weedy ponds. It does not present a problem if the pond freezes to the bottom in winter: the Crucian Carp simply burrows down into the mud and hibernates. Originally the two species were native to western Siberia and eastern Europe, but have been transplanted over the years to western Europe, including the British Isles. The Crucian Carp is a relatively common species in the midlands and the south of England; although, as far as I am aware, the Gibel Carp has not been introduced to this country.

The common-or-garden Goldfish is a domesticated form of the eastern strain of the Gibel Carp, originally native to China. It used to be thought that the Goldfish and the Gibel Carp were separate species, but it seems to be accepted now that they are two strains of the same species. The Goldfish has been farmed in China for over a thousand years. It appears that it was originally farmed for food – the selective

breeding to turn it into an ornamental fish came later. Today there are many different varieties of Goldfish. The standard Goldfish resembles its wild ancestor except that it is orange: however, Goldfish can also be grey or black! In addition to the standard fish there is also the 'Comet', which has a standard shaped body, with a greatly enlarged tail. Then there are the real exotics with very strangely shaped bodies and fins: the Shubunkin, the Oranda, the Veiltail, and so on. The standard fish or the Comet stand a reasonable chance of survival in the wild, but the more exotic and outlandish forms tend to be poor swimmers and would stand virtually no chance of survival in the wild.

There seems to be considerable uncertainty about when the Goldfish first arrived in Western Europe. It is thought that the fish first arrived in Portugal in around 1611. It is, however, not known when the fish first arrived in England. It is possible that it arrived here before 1665 – Samuel Pepys, the diarist, refers to ornamental "foreign" fish in his entries for 1665, and these fish may well have been Goldfish. In any case, we can be fairly certain that the fish arrived in 1691 or shortly afterwards, at the same time as the Crucian Carp. (According to Riehl and Baensch, Goldfish were first bred in Holland in 1728.)

The irony is that in its natural state the Goldfish is a drab little fish with a dark back, silvery or yellowish sides, and greyish fins; in other words, it is well camouflaged in the weedy, muddy ponds which are its preferred habitat. The fish spawn in mid-summer. As with other Cyprinid species, the males develop white tubercles (pimples) on the head and gill plates, and the females become distended with their eggs. Following a brief courtship ritual, the eggs, which are slightly sticky, are scattered over the pond plants. (In due course, the eggs hatch into fry which have the drab wild colouration: the ornamental fish do not begin to develop the orange colouration until they are about eight months old.) However, it is in its spawning habits that the Goldfish reveals a marked difference from its close relative the Crucian Carp. In order to spawn successfully, whether in the wild, or in an aquarium, the Goldfish requires a sustained water temperature of 20 to 22°C. This is very much higher than the temperature required by

BUTTERFLIES

the Crucian Carp and a few degrees higher than that required by the Common Carp. This explains why, in spite of the fact that over the years large numbers of Goldfish have been released into our rivers, lakes, and canals, they have failed to create feral populations in this Country: our water temperatures simply do not reach the required level for long enough. The few feral populations which have existed in this country have been in habitats where the water has been artificially heated by factories or power stations. In warmer climates, for example in Southern Europe or parts of North America, feral populations appear to be quite common. Incidentally, in feral populations the fish revert very quickly back to the original, wild colouration. However, that is not quite the end of the story. It seems that the Goldfish has an unusual, alternative method of spawning. In some parts of Europe, on the limits of its range, there are feral populations of Goldfish which co-exist with populations of Crucian Carp and/or Common Carp, and which are entirely female:

“These females reproduce by pairing with males of related species such as carp, crucian carp, etc. During spawning true fertilisation does not take place, for the spermatozoa penetrate the outer membranes of the eggs but perish before their nuclei combine with those of the eggs. However, the mere presence of the sperm stimulates the egg nuclei to start dividing and thus produce new individuals. The offspring produced in this way will have received only the hereditary genes of the female, and therefore can only become females. This form of reproduction is known as gynogenesis, and is said to be extremely rare among animals.

Personally, I have never considered the Goldfish to be a particularly interesting species, nevertheless it seems that there is more to this small species than meets the eye! I appreciate that beauty is very much in the eye of the beholder, but personally I do not find these ornamental forms of fish very attractive. I much prefer my fish ‘au naturel’: that is to say, as Nature intended! For me, the somewhat garish colours of the Goldfish or the Koi Carp will never match the subtle shades of colour and delicate metallic sheens of a healthy, wild fish from a clean, healthy environment...

Tony Onions

Apart from the occasional early sighting, butterflies as a whole remained inactive until towards the end of March when a few milder days with sunshine brought an end to the long period of consistently cold weather of cold nights and frequent early morning frosts.

All sightings of the **Brimstone *Gonopteryx rhamni*** reported were on 25 March and from eight well spread localities, including six gardens.

Only two **Red Admirals *Vanessa atalanta*** were noted, one resting on the north wall of Bradgate Park on 13 January and the other at Cossington Meadows on 25 March. The **Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*** was more widely reported being noted in 12 scattered localities with the first in FTS’s Barlestone garden on 18 February and the largest number on 31 March at Cossington Meadows where five were present.



Peacock © Jim Graham

Only six **Peacock *Inachis io*** were reported with the first one flying along Swithland Reservoir dam on 20 January and during March one was seen nectaring on winter flowering heather in HS’s Chaveney Road garden in Quorn on the 11th, one was in FTS’s Barlestone garden on the 20th, two were at Cossington Meadows on the 25th and one at Bradgate Park on the 27th. Two **Comma *Polygonia c-album*** were reported, one in a garden in Warwick Avenue, Quorn and one in a Barlestone garden, both on 25 March.

As can be seen most early reports are of butterflies seen in gardens and it would be good if more members reported any such sightings.

This was an interesting, cold quarter following the exceptionally mild autumn.

Peter Gamble

October to December 2015

A total of 231 moths of 39 species were received from a small but keen group of recorders (three to be exact) for this quarter, these include just three micro moth species which were **Light Brown Apple Moth *Epiphyas postvittana***, **Rhomboid Tortrix *Acleris rhombana*** and **Garden Rose Tortrix *Acleris variegana*** all from Rothley.

The lovely **December Moth *Poecilocampa populi*** is always a pleasure to see and showed up on time from October onwards. **Red-green Carpet *Chloroclysta siterata*** has progressed from being quite a rarity to one we expect to see at this time of year and was widespread and well recorded. The last **Common Marbled Carpet *Chloroclysta truncata*** was seen on 11 November and the only **Spruce Carpet *Thera britannica*** was from Rothley in late October, also **Juniper Carpet *Thera juniperata*** was only recorded from Rothley. Despite being some of the flimsiest looking species around during the winter the **November *Epirita* spp.** and **Winter Moth *Operophata* spp.** complex always seem to be in huge numbers, they were well recorded from moth traps plus quite evident in car headlights at night throughout the whole of this quarter.

A late singleton of the summer brood of **Early Thorn *Selene dentaria*** was at Quorn mid-October but **Feathered Thorn *Colotois pennaria*** was widespread in good numbers from late October through to the end of November. Another group that look too delicate to be on the wing through the winter are **Scarce Umber *Agriopis aurantiaria*** and **Mottled Umber *Erannis defoliaria***: both were well recorded. Usually noted for being on the wing late in the year from the southern counties, a single late **Willow Beauty *Peribatodes rhomboidaria*** was at Rothley in early October.

The most numerous and widespread species was **Large Yellow Underwing *Noctua pronuba*** and all in October. The only larval stage reported this quarter was of **Broom *Ceramica pisi*** from Bradgate Park in early October. Singletons of **Black Rustic *Aporophyla nigra*** were recorded at Rothley and Quorn during the first half of

October, and two **Tawny Pinion *Lithophane semibrunnea*** from the same Rothley garden at the end of October. The closely related **Blair's Shoulder-knot *Lithophane leauteri*** was at Quorn up to the middle of October.

Two rather nice moths found at this time of year, **Green-brindled Crescent *Allophyes oxycanthae*** was widespread throughout October and in numbers, but **Brindled Green *Drybotodes eremita*** was only at Quorn in early November. The **Chestnut *Conistra vaccinii*** is an exceptionally common moth out in the field, but usually only found in small numbers from gardens; October and November produced the only records of this from Rothley and also a single **Dark Chestnut *Conistra ligula*** from the same site. The **Brick *Agrochola circellaris***, **Red-line Quaker *Agrochola lota***, **Yellow-line Quaker *Agrochola macilenta***, **Beaded Chestnut *Agrochola lychnidis*** and **Lunar Underwing *Omphaloscelis lunosa*** are all true autumn/winter species and all were out and about throughout the quarter. Just two **Sallow *Cirrhia icterita*** from Quorn in mid-October were the only records, **Angle Shades *Phlogophora meticulosa*** from Rothley and Quorn. A solitary **Pale Mottled Willow *Paradrina clavipalpis*** was in the trap at Rothley. **Silver Y *Autographa gamma*** were recorded in October and early November. Finally a single **Snout *Hypena proboscidalis*** was at Rothley in early October.



Hypena proboscidalis © Steve Woodward

Many thanks to those few dedicated recorders.

Graham Finch

January to March 2016

Always a sparse quarter, it took three members to record 94 moths of 17 species, with a combination of light trapping and daytime



Diurnea fagella © Steve Woodward

observations. The characteristic leaf mines of *Stigmella aurella* were noted widespread from February to March. All of the following records except one, come from LWP at Rothley, who soldiered on throughout this lean period, many thanks Les.



White-shouldered House-moth © Steve Woodward

The **White-shouldered House-moth** *Endrosis sarcitrella* was found at light and indoors throughout March. A single *Diurnea fagella* came to light at Rothley late March, as did *Agonopterix heracliiana*. The only other record of a micro moth came from LWP again at Rothley, where he bred out a single **Light Brown Apple Moth** *Epiphyas postvittana* from a pupa. Twelve species of macro moths were recorded and they were **March Moth** *Alsophila aescularia*, **Brindled Pug** *Eupithecia abbreviata* all in February and March. A solitary **Early Thorn** *Selene dentaria* was attracted to a window in Groby. Just a single **Pale Brindled Beauty** *Phigalia pilosaria* in early March, and **Dotted Border** *Agriopis marginaria* on two nights. Making up the numbers were the Orthosia bunch, things would certainly seem bleak without these! One of the nicest, three **Powdered Quaker** *Orthosia gracilis* at the end of March, with **Common Quaker** *Orthosia cerasi* the most frequently-recorded species and also

the highest number, recorded on seven nights with the highest total of 13 on 24 March. **Clouded Drab** *Orthosia incerta* was recorded on four nights all in ones and twos, **Hebrew Character** *Orthosia gothica* fared little better appearing on six nights with four being the highest on 14 March. The only species recorded in January was **Satellite** *Eupsilia transversa* albeit just a singleton on the 24th. Finally, two **Chestnut** *Conistra vaccinii* on 12 March and a single **Dark Chestnut** *Conistra ligula* on 5 February.

Graham and Anona Finch

BEETLES

I will include the beetle records from the last quarter of 2015 here as there were only three records from one observer. They were: a single **Minotaur** *Typhaeus typhoeus* from Bradgate Park at the end of November, this must now be the most reliable site in the county for this species; a **Seven-spot Ladybird** *Coccinella septempunctata* at King's Norton at the end of December, and a single **Harlequin Ladybird** *Harmonia axyridis* at Empingham in mid-October.

Many thanks to SFW for sending in these records, they were the only ones received.

Starting the first quarter for 2016, with quite a contrast, five recorders managed a total of 1948 individuals of 125 species, which included 45 species of Carabidae and 43 species of Staphylinidae; now isn't it much more interesting when everyone makes the effort to count them all up? I know it can be a bit of a pain, but the results really are worth it. As the numbers show, it has been quite a busy first quarter with quite a few highlights. The first was an invitation to look over some old pollarded Willows near Carlton on 25 January, before they were cut down. Out of the 18 species found there the best was *Isochnus sequens*; a very small weevil that was only added to the county list last year, a single was sieved from the soft wood debris from inside one of the trunks. This constitutes about the fourth record for the county of this species.

A visit to the Miles Piece NR at Keyham on 23 February produced 12 species including the



Old Pollards at Carlton © Steve Woodward

Staphylinid *Brachyglutta fossulata* - previously just 17 records.

March 10th saw Loughborough Big Meadows looking more like the Ouse Washes than anything else, with small streams of water flooding across the road at quite a pace. It was impossible not to notice the huge quantity of beetles that were washed up in the current and coming to a halt at various obstacles such as fence posts and half-submerged logs. There were "oil slicks" containing tens of thousands of beetles all over the place - a half hour with a flour sieve and I had scooped up well over a thousand beetles, most were already dead, very few were still alive. Needless to say the next few weeks were spent glued to the microscope, 81 species were identified, some in significant numbers, 206 *Philonthus carbonarius* and 213 *Philonthus cognatus* and 85 *Xantholinus longiventris* all Staphs. Also two of the scarce *Carabus monilis* were amongst the flotsam, this species is rarely recorded in the county now and the 'Big Meadows' is definitely the most reliable site for it. We know this area severely floods several times each year and it just makes you wonder about the number of animals that must get displaced through this action.

A summary of some of the rest in checklist order were as follows: 12 *Carabus granulatus* were found sheltering in rotten wood at Mountsorrell Meadows end March. All the regular Carabids were well recorded, some in numbers, 50 *Bembidion biguttatum* and 117 *Bembidion guttula*, another Carabid of note was a single *Notiophilus palustris* at Rutland Water in mid-March. A single *Notiophilus substriatus* from LBM early March, (I'll abbreviate Loughborough Big Meadows, to LBM as this site

crops up quite frequently). The odd looking *Clivina fossor* at LBM early March, as did two other infrequently seen Carabids *Trechus quadristriatus* and *Asaphidion curtum* all as singletons, both in early March at LBM. The only records of three *Patrobis atrorufus* were found at Mountsorrel Meadows at the end of March. Most Carabids are typically black, so the next three species made a pleasant change *Ocys harpaloides* with an orange head and pronotum and blue/black elytra was widespread in January and March, and the glistening bright brassy-green *Poecilus cupreus* and *Poecilus versicolor* were both at LBM in March. At the same site and day, a single large black with reddish legs *Curtonotus aulicus*, at the opposite end of the scale at Mountsorrel Meadows were several *Trichocellus placidus* being small and brown sieved from reed/grass tussocks at the end of March. The similar *Acupalpus dubius* was sieved from various tussocks along the Soar Valley in February and March. A single striking *Badister bullatus* was found under bark of a dead tree at the Miles Piece in late February. *Demetrias atricapillus* and *Paradromius linearis* were found to be quite widespread from January to March whereas *Philorhizus melanocephalus* was only recorded at Mountsorrel Meadows at the end of March.

LBM produced a single *Helophorus brevipalpus* (Helephoridae), two *Sphaeridium bipustulatum* and one *Sphaeridium lunatum* (Hydrophilidae) plus Shenton Estates produced singles of *Sphaeridium lunatum* and *Sphaeridium scaraboides* in early February. The only *Cercyon haemorrhoidalis* was from horse dung at Breedon Lane in late February. Hibernating *Silpha atrata* (Silphidae) were found at a variety of sites, under bark, grass cuttings and inside dead wood.

Of the Staphylinidae ('staphs'), a single atypical looking staph *Anthobium unicolor* was found in Bradgate Park at the end of March, a solitary *Tachinus marginellus* was found at the LBM, last recorded by Derek Lott in 2009 from the same site. With only 18 records of *Tachinus subteranneus* a single was beat from a deer carcass at Bradgate Park at the end of March. The most widespread staph was *Anotylus rugosus*, mainly from the Soar Valley but also from Carlton and The Miles Piece at Keyham.

Out of the 12 species of *Stenus* recorded, the red-spotted *Stenus bimaculatus* was the most widespread, with *S. clavicornis* and *S. juno* found at several sites but only along the Soar Valley. In fact the Soar Valley produced most of the records for all the *Stenus* species, except for *Stenus flavipes* which was only found at The Miles Piece, Keyham. A single *Rugilus erichsonii* was beaten from a dead deer carcass at Bradgate Park, and the similar *Rugilus rufipes* was again mainly from the Soar Valley and The Miles Piece. Looking nothing like any of the above Staphs, five *Sunius propinquus* were sieved from a grass tussock in a field at Breedon Lane. *Lathrobium brunnipes* were at LBM and The Miles Piece at the end of February and beginning of March and the similar *Lathrobium geminum* were at LBM and Carlton. Two *Philonthus carbonarius* and two *Philonthus cognatus* were found at Shenton Estates in early February. The latter is a nice easy black Staph to identify as it has the underside of the first antennal segment bright yellow. LBM produced an impressive list of Staphs including two *Philonthus jurgens*, 49 *P. laminatus*, six *P. splendens*, three *P. varians*, one *Bisnius sordidus*, 16 *Ocyopus aenocephalus*, two *Tasgius globulifer*, one *Quedius curtippennis* and 20 *Q. semiaeneus* to mention a few. Two other Staphs recorded were *Xantholinus linearis* and *X. longiventris* both widespread.



Sifting at Carlton © Steve Woodward

Few dung beetles (Scarabaeidae) were found but included two *Aphodius fimetarius* in the samples from LBM, and *Aphodius prodromus* and *A. sphacelatus* were quite widespread mainly from horse and sheep dung.

The only click beetle (Elateridae) recorded was *Agriotes lineatus*, three were taken from the floodwater at LBM. A quick check in Bradgate Park to see if *Necrobia violacea* (Cleridae) were still OK resulted in eight being beaten from a deer corpse. *Kateretes pusillus*, (Kateretidae) which was last recorded by Derek Lott from Buddon Wood, in 1995, making the two sieved from reed/grass tussocks at Mountsorrel Meadows a nice find and the tiny but distinctive *Psammoecus bipunctatus* (Silvanidae) were in huge numbers: over 150 at the same site on the same day. A single *Atomaria mesomela* (Crypyophagidae) was found at LBM, another small but distinctive species with just 12 previous records.



Pine Ladybird © Steve Woodward

A respectable eight species of ladybirds (Coccinellidae) were recorded at Mountsorrel Meadows producing large numbers of *Coccidula rufa* mainly from sieved reed/grass tussocks. 7-spot Ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata* were the most widely recorded, just one sighting of Harlequin Ladybird *Harmonia axyridis* from Hinckley. The only records of 2-spot Ladybird *Adalia bipunctata* came from a Loughborough garden. 22-spot Ladybird *Psyllobora vigintiduopunctata* were out and about at Carlton and in a Loughborough garden, as were Pine Ladybird *Exochomus quadripustulatus*, the latter throughout March, and last 16-spot Ladybird *Tytthaspis sedecimpunctata* were scattered in Mountsorrel Meadows.

The pollards at Carlton held a single *Oulema rufocyanea* (Chrysomelidae) and a single Green Dock Beetle *Gastrophysa viridula* was at LBM. The stripy *Hydrothrassa marginella* was found under bark of a dead tree in Bradgate Park and a single *Phyllotreta undulata* was found at Holwell Mouth.

I will finish off with the seven species of Weevils (Apionidae - Curculionidae) found: two species at Mountsorrel Meadows were ***Ceratapion onordi*** and ***Notaris scirpi*** both from sieved reed/grass tussocks. The incredibly common ***Sitona lineatus*** was at various sites and the not-so-common ***Hypera nigrirostris*** was among the flotsam at LBM. Inside soft dead wood at Carlton, were over 100 of the “looking nothing like a weevil” ***Euophryum confine*** and finally a single **Small Nettle Weevil *Nedyus quadrimaculatus*** was sieved from a grass tussock in a small piece of woodland at Rutland Water.

Many thanks to the recorders.

Graham Finch

OTHER INSECTS

Very few records this quarter, despite the mild winter, emerging invertebrates were rather slow to appear in many areas.

Only one Hemipteran bug was reported, a single **Green Shieldbug *Palomina prasina*** at Beatty Avenue in Leicester on 24 February.

Diptera

Records for this group were very thin on the ground and the only hoverfly record was for a few **Drone Flies, *Eristalis tenax*** at Monks Rest, Humberstone on Blackthorn at the end of March and a single at Breedon Hill on 10 January. Writing these notes up in May, I am finding numbers of hoverflies locally as being abysmal. There does seem to be, from several eminent sources, news of a widespread decline in diversity of species, which would at the present time be hard to dispute.

A few records of the **Dark-edged Bee-fly *Bombylius major*** were submitted, with records from Quorn, Monks Rest, Scraftoft Lane and at Hinckley, St Mary's Churchyard with a maximum of three, all records were from late March. The only other record I have for this group is for the **Holly Leafminer *Phytomyza ilicis*** submitted by HI and SW from a wide area in the county from 13 sites. Even that species seems to be reduced in numbers.

Let's hope for better things next quarter.

Hymenoptera

Social Bees

As is usual for this quarter the **Buff-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus terrestris*** is the first off the blocks, so to speak, and was the most commonly recorded around the county. The first queen recorded was from Barlestone on 25 February, all other records were from March and into the next quarter. Numbers built up at Barlestone during the month, peaking at ten or more by the end of the month. Other queens recorded were from Loughborough, Quorn, Bradgate Park, Walton (several), Bruntingthorpe, Burton on the Wolds, Wetton Wood at Charley (several), Belvoir Castle, Burbage, Hinckley, Carlton Bridge, Queen's Park in Loughborough and in Leicester at Evington Park and Spinney Hill Park.

Red-tailed Bumblebees *Bombus lapidarius* queens were fewer in number than the previous species, first recorded was a grounded queen at Castle View, Leicester on 21 February, all other records in March, at Barlestone, from 14 March, numbers built up to an impressive six queens by the end of the month. Other records came from Sandalwood Road in Loughborough, Spinney Hill Park, Belvoir Castle and Burbage, St Catherine's churchyard.

Few records of **Early-nesting Bumblebees *Bombus pratorum*** were received this quarter, I have not recorded any queens in my garden since 2013, prior to which I could usually count on recording at least one in my garden. Records were received from FTS's garden at Barlestone, with a single queen on 16 March and three noted at the end of the month. The only other report was of a single queen at Burbage, St Catherine's churchyard and St Mary's churchyard at Barwell both on 31 March.

Tree Bumblebees *Bombus hypnorum*, a few queens were noted, mainly in late March, from Barlestone, Quorn, Queens Park in Loughborough, Burbage and Hinckley. The only queen reported for February was from Loughborough on the 22nd.

Queens of the **White-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus lucorum*** were only reported from Barlestone, a single queen on 14 March and at the end of the month, at Thorpe Acre Spinney in Loughborough on the 19th and one at Belvoir

Castle on the 30th.

Just a single record of the **Common Carder Bee *Bombus pascourum***, at Monks Rest in Humberstone on 31 March.

Again, just a single record of the cleptoparasite ***Bombus vestalis*** from Barlestone on 31 March.

Honey Bees *Apis mellifera*, a few from PHG's garden in Quorn in February, and from Evington Village on 31 March and one with full pollen basket at Leicester Arboretum foraging on Lesser Celandine, a plant I have never previously seen utilised before, on the same date.

Solitary Bees

This mainly concerns the **Hairy-footed Flower Bee *Anthophora plumipes***, with records for the latter part of the month from Quorn, Spinney Hill Park, Evington Park, Monks Rest, Walton, Loughborough, Burbage and Hinckley and was widespread by the end of the month locally.



Anthophora plumipes © Steve Woodward

Just two other records were submitted, a single **Red Mason Bee *Osmia bicornis*** at Loughborough on 29 March and ***Andrena scotica*** at Monks Rest on Blackthorn on 31 March.

Howard Bradshaw

FLOWERING PLANTS and FERNS

The plant report will be combined with that of the second quarter in the next edition of *Heritage*.

OTHER RECORDS

Records were also received for:

Molluscs, Ants, Galls, Barklice, Aphids, Psyllids, Scale Insects, Millipedes, Mites, Mosses, Lichens and Fungi.

WEATHER

January was another mild but largely cloudy month. Winds once again came in the main from the west and southwest and brought with them predominately mild and cloudy air masses but the rainfall they brought was fairly steady so flooding was not too much of a problem. High pressure was again absent for the majority of the month and there were few clear sunny days. Indeed many areas of low pressure crossed to the north of the British Isles and there some brought significant winds but we managed to avoid the worst effects of these here. Afternoon temperatures averaged 8°C which is 1.5°C above normal, while night time temperatures averaged 2.2°C about 0.7°C above the usual. The overall average of 5.1°C was about 1°C higher than average. Rain fell at both Mountsorrel and Barrow on 20 days but we avoided heavy falls and the monthly total amounted to 53 mm at both stations which was 12% below the long term average of 60 mm. It was another dull month with just 58 hours of sunshine or 10% below normal thanks to the frequent mild and humid air masses that contained a great deal of cloud. Winds were frequently fresh or strong from the west or southwest with the strongest gust of 42 mph being recorded on the 26th.

The first ten days of the month were mild and wet but then it began to turn cooler and drier for a few days. The week commencing the 14th was the only cooler week of the winter so far. In this period we had six night frosts with the coldest night of the month registering a temperature of -3.8°C being recorded on the morning of the 18th at Barrow. That night saw our first snow fall of the winter as milder air ran into the cold air sitting over us and the precipitation fell as snow at a temperature around freezing point. Amounts were generally small just 2-4 cm for most of us but it was a very welcome sight for our friends relatives from Australia who had never seen snow before!

The snow was only a one day wonder and it soon disappeared and the end of the month was extremely mild with temperatures peaking at 14.2°C in Mountsorrel on the 27th with Ken Hickling at Barrow upon Soar registering 15°C in this last week of the month that felt more like spring. We are on course at the moment for one of the mildest winters on record if February stays kind to us and it could even break the record set in the 1973/74 winter. If this is the case the sound of lawn mowers will soon be heard again too as the average temperature of the winter so far has meant the grass has been able to continue grow throughout most of it!

February was a month of many contrasting weather types but it was never too cold but it did at least resemble a winter month and it was in stark contrast to the warmth of December! Average afternoon temperatures were 8.5°C, about 1.5°C above normal while night time temperatures were logged at 1.5°C, about normal for February. Ken Hickling, our weather recorder at Barrow upon Soar, registered 13 air frosts which was slightly above the usual average of 12 for this month over the last 30 years. The overall mean temperature of 5°C was 1°C above the long term average. The figures tell us it was a wet month with 60 mm falling at both stations 25% above normal but closer examination shows us that half of this total fell on just two days and that 14 days were actually dry so once again statistics don't always tell the whole story! More surprising was the amount of sunshine. We recorded 122 hours which was 50% above normal and this is down to cooler and drier air masses affecting us for half of the month which brought us clearer and drier arctic-sourced air. Winds blew mainly from a westerly and north westerly direction and reached a peak gust of 47 mph on the 7th.

The month began on a mild note and it was very wet. The wettest day of the month was recorded on the 6th when 21 mm fell and the following day a violent rain and wind squall gave us 5 mm in 10 minutes and produced gusts of wind up to 50 mph in places. The jet stream then moved south for a week and we found ourselves with colder and drier weather. There were frequent night frosts and a few snow showers but it was never very cold. Nine hours of sunshine was recorded on the 16th in the colder

arctic air-mass. The third week saw it turn milder again and the warmest day of the month was on the 21st when I recorded 15.1°C in Mountsorrel with Ken logging a spring like 16°C. The last week saw the return of colder conditions and our coldest night of the winter was the 24th of February when temperatures in Barrow upon Soar dropped to -5.4°C.

March was the wettest since 2008 and the 8th wettest in Ken Hickling's 32 years of record at Barrow upon Soar. March was also the coldest since the exceptionally cold March of 2013. Average daytime temperatures were logged at 9.5°C which was 0.5°C below normal while average night time temperatures were logged at 2.1°C which was 0.3°C below the normal. There were seven night frosts recorded at Barrow and Mountsorrel. The overall mean of 5.8°C was 0.5°C below the expected figure. It was a wet month with 72 mm falling at Mountsorrel and 68 mm at Barrow which was 40% above normal. However statistics have to be viewed with caution in that most of this rain fell on just three days in the month. Rain actually fell on just 11 days leaving 20 dry ones. Winds were variable with my maximum gust of 37 mph being recorded on the 26th. Sunshine totals were logged at 116 hours, about average for March.

March started on a cold note. The first week saw snowflakes falling on four occasions with the coldest day of 5.2°C being logged on the 6th. The 9th saw a deluge of 26 mm or half of the month's usual total fall in a single day. This resulted in extensive river flooding in the Soar Valley and surrounding tributaries as this total of rain had already fallen on saturated ground from the very wet first week of the month. The floods were the worst locally for at least five years and they caused considerable transport problems for several days with many cars getting stuck in water that was much deeper than anticipated! The first week also saw our coldest night with -4°C being recorded in Barrow on the 9th.

The weather then took a complete about turn with high pressure becoming established over the UK for the first time since the Autumn. Air pressure on the 13th reached 1035 mb, the highest figure since the previous September. The next ten days saw this quiet, settled weather

continue. Some days were cloudy but some very sunny, with our warmest and sunniest day being recorded on the 25th when I logged 14.3°C and we enjoyed 11.7 hours of sunshine.

As the Easter weekend approached the weather predictably became unsettled again and storm Katie rolled in for Easter Monday giving us lots of rain and a little snow too but early Easters such as this one are usually and expectedly cooler and wetter than when Easter falls later in April. My colleague who lives locally has done a study of the last 100 Easter and has found that Easters in March are nearly 3°C cooler than Easters in late April but before you clamour for a fixed date change to this time he discovered that rainfall varied little. So it is a question of whether you like your rain colder or warmer!

The winter as a whole from December to February was the mildest ever recorded in England since the earliest records began in 1659. The average temperature was 6.2°C, a full 2.3°C above normal. This was mainly due to the very mild December which saw average temperature of 10°C a full 5°C above normal and a figure so high it has never been approached in the England and Wales temperature record! The warmth was caused by a large high pressure which covered central Europe and steered our winds into the SW and brought us air all the way from W Africa for the entire month. January and February stayed mainly mild too. Snow fell on just four days in the entire winter and lay on just one the 19th of January, when most of us got a light cover of between 1 and 3 cm. There were just 18 air frosts in the 91 winter nights. This was the third winter running without a notable cold spell and this followed the five winters from 2008- 2013 which all had notable cold periods. This shows the variability of the British climate and this makes it so difficult to predict. My money is on a cold spring and writing this on March 10th we have already had five days with snowflakes falling more than in the entire winter!

Phil Morrish

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