



FIFTY YEARS IN EAST LEICESTERSHIRE

As I have spent the last 50 years or so cycling around parts of East Leicestershire, which was more accessible to where I live, I thought I would write a few notes reflecting on this period.

When you reach a certain age much of the past remains clear in your mind, the present less so and the future not ours to see, which judging by the way things are going, is not something to look forward to anyway, certainly not for wildlife globally.

In the spring of the early 1960s, after the closure of many railway lines by Dr. Beeching, in an attempt at that period to increase my knowledge of the local flora, I thought it would be a good idea to walk along some of those disused lines. A few people who enjoyed walking could walk miles with impunity, my favourite walk usually started at Cold Newton below Lord Morton's Fox Covert, north to the large cutting near Thorpe Trussels and sometimes beyond.

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At that time agricultural practices were changing rapidly and these linear habitats became a refuge for many species. Cowslip meadows were going in to rapid decline at that time and species like this could be found in many places, abundantly so at Thorpe Trussels where a few Green-winged Orchids also found a place of refuge. Common Spotted-orchids were flowering in their hundreds near Cold Newton where the Common Twayblade was recorded below Lord Morton's Covert on one occasion. I also found my first Bee Orchid there (much scarcer than they are today). Several other declining species found were Betony and Milkwort among others.

Butterflies were plentiful, Dingy Skippers would be flying all along that corridor and one spring day in 1964 at Thorpe Trussels on a bank covered in Birds-foot-trefoil there were Dingy Skippers, Grizzled Skippers and Green Hairstreaks all nectaring on this embankment, a joy I still retain in my mind today. On a May Day in 1965 I encountered my first ever Duke of Burgundy among the Cowslips, I returned the next day but failed to see it again. At that time

I believe a small colony existed at Owston Wood but doubt they are still there at the present day. One of the most characteristic nesting birds at that time were Tree Pipits, two or three pairs were at many suitable spots where the singing males would use the telegraph lines as singing posts. Turtle Doves would also be found at many places along these disused lines and were not uncommon at the nearby Ashby Pastures, a few hung on further east on the track at Marefield until a few years ago but I have no idea if they are still found at the present. At Thorpe Trussels early in the 1960s a Corncrake was heard calling several times - perhaps one of the last records for the County. A visit to that site, a year or so back, revealed that this cutting had returned to dense hawthorn scrub and its former glory was a distant memory.

Many summer visitors have declined in recent years, none more so than the beautiful Redstart. This bird was recorded widely across the county in the 60s from the Charnwood Forest and much of east Leicestershire. Jack Otter knew every pair at Tilton Wood. In one of the first publications I believe for the Loughborough Naturalists' Club, "The Birds of East Leicestershire" he comments widely on this species from Tilton, Owston Wood and the Eye Brook valley and elsewhere. On my cycling travels during that period, I found pairs at Burrough on the Hill, Old Dalby Wood, Baggrave Park and along the brookside at Keyham Bridge. Reading of a pair at Glooston I decided to cycle along to see if I could find it and sure enough found a pair singing in the hedgerow by the stream. This bird is rarely found anywhere breeding in the county at the present day, apart from a pair recorded from the north east of the county, you would be very lucky to see one.

Whilst cycling along the track near Glooston looking for the Redstart I noticed, adjacent to track, a marshy meadow bounded by the track and a small stream, it contained numerous Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* as well as more typical flora of such a meadow. A further search revealed a few specimens of Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*. What I didn't know then, was that I had stumbled on Glooston Bog and according to the *Flora of Leicestershire*, this bog also contained such species as the Early Marsh-

orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* and the rare Flat Sedge *Blysmus compressus*.

What struck me forcibly at the time was how such an interesting site was to be found in an area that generally very poor for botanical species. Cycling by this spot the following summer, I found it had completely disappeared, it was in fact just part of a wheat field, no one passing by this site would have known of its existence, apart from a few botanists at that time.

This was a period when a great deal of destruction was done. Farmers were encouraged by the government at that time to plough up useless meadows, straighten streams etc. What's changed!!

The machines they use today are monsters of efficiency. Farming today is a vast agrobusiness with little time for nature, apart from those involved with animal husbandry and small number of farmers who are alive to the sensitivity of wildlife and attempt to remedy the problem the best they can, now the government has cut the subsidy for wildlife protection.

But the days when a farmer ploughing the furrow when coming upon a Lapwings nest, would dismount and put the eggs to one side before continuing his journey, those days have passed into the dustbin of history.

A final thought, work done by the botanists for the 1988 *Flora of Leicestershire*, probably saved such important meadows such as Muston and Cribbs Meadow for posterity - although they too are a relic of what once was.

Howard Bradshaw

References

Flora of Leicestershire. 1988 A. L. Primavesi & P. A. Evans. Leicestershire Museums.

Bulletin Leicester Lit. & Phil. Natural History Section Spring 1964, number 6 & Spring 1965, number 10.

The Birds of East Leicestershire. 1965. J. Otter. Loughborough Naturalists' Club.

CLASSIFIED RECORDS

Records submitted for *Heritage* have been checked as far as possible by the writers of the various sections. They have not all been formally validated by County Recorders (as this is not practical on a quarterly basis).

The original records from which *Heritage* is compiled are archived. The paper records are temporarily in the care until a more secure location for them has been found. Electronic records are held by Helen Ikin.

MAMMALS

PJD has had one or two **Hedgehogs** coming to feed in her Quorn garden every night from 1 January until the end of the month. Then they were not seen for few weeks but reappeared on 1 March and were recorded on the camera trap throughout March. An interesting record.

Molehills have been evident in Swithland throughout the quarter and other records come from Woodhouse, Loughborough, Quorn, Cotes, Thornton Reservoir, Markfield, Odstone, Snarestone, Gopsall Park, Barkby, Morcott, Thrussington, Ashwell, Teigh, Whissendine, Cadeby, Kirby Lodge Farm, Wymeswold, Swinford Corner, Stanford Reservoir, Cotesbach and Seagrave.

The first **Bat** records of the season come from DAP in Swithland who had three pipistrelles on 24 March.



Brown Hare © Steve Woodward

As many as seven **Brown Hares** were watched in a field on the Shenton estate, three were seen near Thrussington, two at Cotesbach and singles at Groby and Cadeby. All in late

February and March. The impression is that Hares are scarce in the west of the county. Michael Stanley always used to spot good numbers in the Belvoir and Stathern area.

A **Rabbit** with myxomatosis was seen by DAP in the churchyard at Breedon on the Hill in February.

Droppings and diggings were noted at Cotes, Odstone, Snarestone, Barkby Thorpe, Morcott, Shenton Estate, Ashwell Grange, Charnwood Quarry, Wanlip Hill, Cadeby, Wide Lane in Wymeswold, Cotesbach, Berrycott Lane at Seagrave, Stoughton and Oadby Lodge Farm. One was squashed on the road at Cadeby near Bull in the Oak. Our impression is that Rabbits become more nocturnal where there is regular disturbance but otherwise are active in the daytime too. JGr had four Rabbits in the hedge of her Holwell garden on 25 March.

Grey Squirrels were noted at Barton in the Beans, Groby, Bradgate Park, Ulverscroft, Wanlip, Southfields Park in Loughborough and Old Dalby.

We have just one record of **Bank Vole** – one dead on a lawn in Markfield.

A very lucky **Wood Mouse** was brought into ATO's Shelthorpe house by his cat on 8 March where it took up residence behind some heavy furniture until the 14th when, having been fed on bird food and grapes, it entered a humane trap and was released in the garden. Two Wood Mice visited JGr's Holwell garden on 6 January – no doubt looking for bird food.

A lovely round **Harvest Mouse** nest was found at Lutterworth, near Moorbarns Farm. It was unoccupied.



Harvest Mouse nest © Steve Woodward

BIRDS

While surveying verges for the forthcoming BSBI plant atlas we found a **Red Fox** skull at Wanlip – probably a road casualty. DAP has had a large vixen scent marking his Swithland garden in January and spotted one crossing The Ridings in Rothley in February and PJD's camera trap recorded one visiting her Quorn garden in early March. A Fox was crossing the road in Holwell on the night of 27 March.

DAP has been lucky enough to twice have a **Stoat** coming within 6 feet of him while gardening in Swithland in late March. It appeared to be totally unafraid.

Signs of **Badgers** were recorded from Jubilee Wood, Snarestone, Charnwood Quarry, Woodhouse Eaves, Longcliffe Lodge Farm, Stoughton and Swinford Corner and a dead Badger was on a road near Swinford Corner and another on the Quorn bypass. PJD saw a Badger "waiting to cross the road" near Beaumanor at the end of January. Setts near Swithland were active with new diggings and evidence of bedding being brought in.



Badger activity © Steve Woodward

Two live **Muntjac** were spotted by SFW in Sheet Hedges Wood at the end of March - plenty of bramble cover in there for them. DAP had one drinking at the stream in his Swithland garden at 7 o'clock one February morning and another was feeding on the dam overflow of Swithland Reservoir on a mid-February afternoon. Two were seen near the nature reserve at Holwell in early March. Slots were seen south of Loughborough, at Teigh, at Stoughton and at Seagrave and droppings were found at Charnwood Quarry in a rough field.

Helen Ikin



Whooper Swans © Jim Graham

What was probably the same **Pink-footed Goose** was at Cropston Reservoir on 2 January and Swithland Reservoir on the 10th. There were few reports of either **Canada** or **Greylag Goose** during the quarter and a single **Egyptian Goose** was at Watermead CP South on 22 January.

Small numbers of **Mandarin Duck**, mostly in pairs, were seen at four sites with the highest count being 21 (11 drakes) at Cropston Reservoir on 20 February. A rather amorous drake was displaying to a female Mallard at Swithland Reservoir by the inflow through the last two weeks of March.



Mandarin Duck © Jim Graham

Numbers of wintering wildfowl were quite low with the highest count of **Wigeon** being just 58 at Cossington Meadows on 28 March (compared to 415 at Watermead CP North on 13 March 2016); most were already paired up. Likewise the maximum number of **Gadwall** noted was just 16 at three sites during the quarter (compared to 107 in 2016) and 88 **Teal** at Watermead CP North on 22 February (262 in 2016). Even numbers of **Mallard** were disappointing with 72 at Cropston Reservoir on 12 February the highest count, less than half the 172 at Watermead CP North in 2016. Up to three drake **Pintail** were frequenting Cossington Meadows between 11 January and 28 March. A total of 52 **Shoveler** was at Swithland Reservoir South on 3 February with smaller numbers at five other sites. Two pairs of **Red-crested Pochard** were noted at Watermead CP South during the quarter whilst small numbers of **Pochard** were at three localities. The best count of **Tufted Duck** came from Swithland Reservoir with 125 on 27 March but this too was much lower than the high of 277 from the same site in 2016. The only other count of note was 71 at Groby Pool on 21 January. Other than a single drake at Cropston Reservoir on 8 January, all other counts of **Goldeneye** came from Swithland Reservoir peaking at just 25 on 15 March. Most reports of **Goosander** were from the Soar Valley complex with a maximum of 24 noted at Wanlip Meadows on 10 January. Up to five were at three other sites. Still hanging on in the country, a single eclipse drake Ruddy Duck was present at Swithland Reservoir on 8 February.

There were few records received for **Red-legged Partridge** and none of **Grey Partridge** whilst the maximum count of **Pheasant** was just two at three sites.

The best counts of **Cormorant** came from Cropston Reservoir peaking at 136, the highest ever count for this site, on a very cold (-3° C) day when a proportion of the water was frozen.

Little Egret records came from seven sites, most of one or two but ten were in a field behind the 'Gate Hangs Well' pub in Syston on 16 February. It is interesting when the highest counts of Little Egret exceed that of **Grey Heron**, six noted at Swithland Reservoir on 18 March the best total. The solitary **Glossy Ibis** was a

frequent, if illusive, visitor to Cossington Meadows throughout the quarter.

Little Grebes were noted at eight sites in small numbers with Albert Village Lake having the only double-figure count with a 12 on 15 January. All double-figure counts of **Great Crested Grebe** came from Cropston Reservoir peaking at 48 on 14 January. A number of displaying pairs were noted from 18 March onwards.

Red Kite was widespread in all three months, mainly one or two. How long will it be until we can prove breeding in the Charnwood area?

Single **Sparrowhawk** were noted at 18 diverse locations including five members' gardens. **Buzzard** records came from 26 widespread locations, with pairs displaying at a minimum of seven sites. **Kestrel** was recorded at 19 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 was regularly located on the Leicester Cathedral nesting platform through the quarter and were joined by an intruding male on a number of occasions but successfully saw off his advances. An interloping male was also chased off at Swithland Reservoir on 20 February.



Peregrine © Jim Graham

Water Rail were located at five locations with two at Cossington Meadows on 28 March. Small numbers of **Moorhen** came from six sites with the only double-figure count being 12 on the River Lin in Bradgate Park on 24 January. The only three-figure count of **Coot** was 107 at Albert Village Lake on 15 January whilst one was already on a nest at Swithland Reservoir by 18 March.

One or probably two pairs of **Oystercatcher** were in the Soar Valley complex with records from Watermead CP South, Cossington Meadows and Wanlip Meadows during March. A single **Avocet** was seen feeding on the scrape at the latter site on the 24th. Early migrant **Little Ringed Plover** were at Wanlip and Cossington Meadows on the 28th with three at the latter. The only **Golden Plover** noted were 58 over Cropston Reservoir on 25 February with a flock of 69 **Lapwing** there on the 12th and 75 at Hicks Lodge on 26 January. A single **Dunlin** was at Albert Village Lake on 26 January and a male **Ruff** was at Wanlip Meadows on 28 March. Numbers of **Snipe** were sparse with five at Cossington Meadows on 1 February and two at Groby Pool on the 19th the only records. A calling **Curlew** was seen heading towards Leicester city centre at dusk on 13 March from Watermead CP South. A **Green Sandpiper** was at Cossington Meadows on the 18th. There were just two records of **Redshank**, singles at Cossington and Wanlip Meadows on 18 January and 28 March respectively.

Over 10,000 **Black-headed Gull** were at Cropston Reservoir on 14 January when they were disturbed by a shooting party taking pot-shots from the shore. The disruption caused the birds to take flight and soon dispersed. An adult **Mediterranean Gull** was in the roost at this site on 25 February. There were few counts of **Common, Lesser Black-backed** or **Herring Gull** during the quarter. At least four different **Yellow-legged Gull** were identified at Albert Village Lake between 15 January and 12 February and at least two **Caspian Gull** were there on and off during January and February and singles were at Watermead CP South on 22 January and 21 February. Juvenile, first-winter and an adult **Iceland Gull** was found at Albert Village Lake during January, whilst up to six different **Glaucous Gull** visited between 14 January and 11 February. The only **Great Black-backed Gull** counts were also from this location peaking at 114 on 15 January.

A migrant adult **Sandwich Tern** was found dead on the dam at Cropston Reservoir on 31 March. The partially severed head indicating the probability of attack by a local Peregrine.

Few **Stock Dove** were noted whilst the highest count of **Wood Pigeon** was just 50 at

Swithland Reservoir on 18 March, however a shooting party was causing much disturbance. Most **Collared Dove** records came from gardens with 11 at Holwell the best count.

The only **Barn Owl** was at Cropston Reservoir in February, whilst at least three **Little Owl** were at Bradgate Park during the quarter and calling **Tawny Owl** were heard at four sites. But surprisingly, no **Short-eared Owl** were reported from Cossington Meadows during the quarter.

Single **Kingfisher** were recorded from six sites. Reports of **Green Woodpeckers** came from 13 locations whilst **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** were also at 13, including three gardens, with drumming birds or pairs reported from six sites.

Few **Magpie** were reported but 15 were noted at Groby on 4 February. **Jay** were reported from seven localities and **Jackdaw** went under-reported but one being rather noisy inside a hollow tree in Mucklin Wood early in January was probably preparing to nest. A high count of just 16 **Carrion Crow** during the period shows just how under-recorded this species whilst an active **Rookery** with at least 15 nests was identified at Woodhouse on 12 March. One or two **Raven** were reported from eight sites with display observed at all of them.

Records of **Goldcrests** came from 11 locations with five at both Puddledyke and Hallgate Spinney, Bradgate Park on 26 March.

There were no significant counts of **Blue, Great** or **Coal Tits**, and usually, no **Willow Tit** were noted at Kelham Bridge whilst **Marsh Tit** were found at just three sites.

All **Sky Lark** records were of single figures from 12 sites.

The first returning **Sand Martin** appeared at Swithland Reservoir on 17 March with nine feeding around tree-top height. Records came from a further five sites by the end of the month with 80 at Cossington Meadows on the 28th the highest count.

Cetti's Warbler was heard from 29 January in the Soar Valley complex and involved a total of at least 11 birds. Calls were also noted at Birstall Meadows and Groby Pool in March. Records of **Long-tailed Tit** came from nine

widespread sites with 14 at Groby Pool and 11 at Holwell in January the largest parties.

Overwintering **Chiffchaff** were noted throughout the quarter with returning migrants heard singing from 12 March onwards. Five were recorded at Quorn & Barrow Sewage Works on 12 January. Returning **Willow Warbler** squeezed into the quarter with singles singing at Groby Quarry on 30 March and Warren Hills the following day. All wintering **Blackcaps** reported were of one or two and came from members' gardens other than a single at Sibley Mill on 25 January.

It was a subdued **Waxwing** year with the first flock of 20 noted on 2 January in Loughborough. Small numbers were then widespread until 25 February. The largest flock encountered was of at least 150 in Glenfield on the 14th.

One or two **Nuthatch** were seen or heard in a variety of locations and frequent mention of the attraction to bird feeders is now being made. **Treecreeper** was noted at six localities with song heard from 11 March. Most **Wren** records were of singles but three were at Cropston Reservoir on 13 March and song was heard at Swithland Wood and Bradgate Park on 26 March.

Holwell seemed to be the best location for **Starling** with at least three counts in excess of 100, the largest being a minimum of 500 on 2 March. An early migrant male **Ring Ouzel** was located at Warren Hills on 29 March remaining until the end of the quarter at least. Most **Blackbird** records came from gardens, mainly of single figures but at least 17 were feasting on mealworms in JG's Cropston garden. Flocks of wintering thrushes were once again poor in number and few records received. The best counts were 500 **Fieldfare** at Holwell on 9 March and 120 **Redwing** at Rabbit Bridge on 4 January. **Song Thrush** was noted at just six locations with singing at two, whilst records of **Mistle Thrush** only came from four.

Robin was recorded in just eight locations, mostly gardens, as was **Duncock**. A pair of **Stonechat** was around the Bradgate Park ruins from 14 January until 19 February at least with another pair found at Hicks Lodge on 26 January and a single female at Cossington meadows on 1 February.



Stonechat © Jim Graham

There were few records for **House Sparrow** and the highest count was just 20 at Saxelby on 26 February, whilst just three **Tree Sparrow** were recorded at Burrough Hill CP and one at Cattows Farm.

Unsurprisingly, all **Grey Wagtail** locations involved water, five of which held one or two individuals although four were on Cropston Reservoir dam on 27 March where a male had been found to be singing on 20 February. 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 of 21 at Cossington Meadows on 18 March.

The only double-figure count of **Chaffinch** was 25 at Thornton Reservoir on 26 January. At least 20 **Brambling** were found at Owston on 29 January, with singles in two members' gardens. All **Greenfinch** records came from gardens as did most **Goldfinch**, but a minimum of 120 of the latter were located at Cropston Reservoir on 8 January.

Most wintering flocks of **Siskin** were of ten or fewer with 20 at Groby Pool on 1 February the largest count. Likewise, ten **Lesser Redpoll** at Swithland Reservoir on 21 February was the best tally. There was just one significant count of **Linnet** over 50 perched on wires at Newtown Linford on 26 February. Two **Crossbill** were heard calling at Bradgate Park on 26 March seen flying toward Cropston Reservoir.

Small numbers of **Bullfinch** were noted at just five sites whilst **Yellowhammer** records came from nine although no count exceeded the 15 at Bradgate Park on 22 February. **Reed Bunting** records came from only six sites.

Jim Graham

REPTILES and AMPHIBIANS

This report covers the final quarter of 2016 and the first quarter of 2017. Perhaps not surprisingly, the sightings of reptiles, amphibians and fish during this period have been few and far between. However, we have started to see more of these groups as the weather has started to warm up.

Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis*:

Our first sighting of a reptile for 2017 comes from PJD, who lives in an area of Quorn which appears to be something of a haven for this species of reptile! On the 25 March, she found one underneath a wheelbarrow. The following day, on the 26 March, she found four in a compost bin. Then, finally, on the 29 March, she found that the number of specimens in the compost bin had increased to five! This is the only sighting for reptiles which we have had for this year. ... so far.

Smooth Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*:

PJD reports that an unspecified number of these amphibians were active in the pond in a neighbour's garden, on the 4 March. Surprisingly, this appears to be the only sighting which we have for this amphibian.

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*:

PHG reports that several specimens were present in two garden ponds in Warwick Road, Quorn on the 12 March. SFW and HI report finding a pair of toads at a lake by the Wash Brook, on the outskirts of Oadby, on the 24 March, 2017. Once again, these are the only sightings which we have for this amphibian.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*:

There appears to be no shortage of Common Frogs in the County. ED reports that he first sighted frog spawn in his garden pond in Shepshed on the 21 February 2017. Over the next two weeks 20 frogs "joined in the frenzy to produce yet more spawn". At the time of sending in his record, the pond was full of feeding tadpoles. Similarly, PJD reports that she found frogs and spawn in her garden pond on the 4 March 2017. PHG reports that around 20 specimens were croaking in the two garden pools in Warwick Road, Quorn on the 12 March. The first clump of spawn appeared on the 14



Frogs and Spawn © Jim Graham

March. A second clump appeared on the 15 March, and two days later on the 17 March there were nine clumps present. By the 19 March the total had risen to 15 clumps of spawn. SFW and HI came across two specimens squashed on the road in Berrycott Lane, near Seagrave, on the 19 March. On the 24 March, at a lake near the Wash Brook, on the outskirts of Oadby, HI and SFW found a vast quantity of spawn - estimated at over 300 clumps! The following day, on the 25 March, they found six clumps of spawn at Strifts Plantation, near Garthorpe - a small village on the upper reaches of the River Eye, to the east of Melton Mowbray.

Tony Onions

FISH (including CRAYFISH)

We have only two sightings for this group for the last two quarters.

Rudd *Scardinius erythrophthalmus*:

On the afternoon of the 2 October 2016, ATO stopped off to watch some people fishing at Shelthorpe Top Pond (otherwise known as Woodthorpe Pond). This small pond is by the roundabout on the A6 Bypass where you turn off for Woodthorpe village and the new housing estates at the back of Shelthorpe. While he was there he observed an angler catch a small Rudd (10- 12 cm long). There is a large population of Rudd in this small pond, and they may have found their way in there by natural means, or they may have been introduced as ornamental stock. (As well as the naturally coloured fish, a 'golden' variety of Rudd is available from garden centres as an ornamental fish for garden ponds.) The Rudd superficially resembles its close relative the Roach (*Rutilus*

rutilus). There are some small anatomical differences - the Rudd has a slightly upturned mouth - but the main differences are in the habits of the two species. The upturned mouth of the Rudd is typical of a species which generally feeds at or near the surface, and the Rudd is unusual in that it is happy to feed on the surface on a hot, sunny day when many other species have retired to the depths. It is very much a fish of still waters, large or small, shallow or deep. The Roach is more of a generalist: it has a terminal mouth and will feed anywhere in the water column. It is found in both still and running water, and is reasonably tolerant of pollution. Back in the days when the River Soar was semi-polluted the river boasted an enormous population of Roach simply because predators like Perch and Pike could not survive in it. The Roach will continue to feed during the winter, but when the water cools down in the autumn the Rudd becomes dormant: and this is particularly true of shallow waters like the Woodthorpe Pond. Both Rudd and Roach require the presence of controlling predators, and this is particularly true of Rudd in smaller waters: where there are no Perch or Pike present there is a tendency for Rudd to form an enormous population of severely stunted fish!

White-clawed Crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*:

On the 6 November 2016 DAP found several specimens of this crustacean while carrying out routine maintenance on the stream which runs through his property at Swithland. At lower altitudes in the county, in the main watercourses, the native White-clawed Crayfish has been replaced by the American Signal Crayfish. However, the native species can still be found in the headwaters of streams, especially on Charnwood Forest, and it is reassuring to know that they are still present at this particular site.

As I write, during the last week of May, the weather has suddenly turned much warmer. With air and water temperatures remaining warm overnight it is likely that many species of fish will seize the opportunity to spawn, and we can also expect the County's reptiles to become more active. I hope our readers will keep their eyes open on their travels, and keep us

informed of anything they see of interest!

Tony Onions

BUTTERFLIES

The consistently cold weather of the two early months of the year was presumably responsible for the absence of butterfly sightings prior to the arrival of March and yet, by the end of the month, sightings of Orange-tip and Holly Blue, two non-hibernating species, were particularly early. Until recent decades butterfly enthusiasts didn't dream of seeing them until towards the end of April.

The **Brimstone *Gonepterys rhamni*** visited eight of our gardens during March and was observed in a total of 12 separate localities with the first sighting on the 12th at Quorn. As usual most sightings were of the wide ranging butter-yellow males and in ones and two but five were observed in and around LWP's Rothley garden on the 25th.

Male **Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*** were active in our Quorn garden with two sightings two hours apart on 30 March and on the same day another was seen by HI & SFW at Groby.

On 31 March a newly emerged **Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*** female was found sunning itself on our boundary hedge at Quorn.



Holly Blue © Jim Graham

Two early **Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*** presumably out of hibernation rather than migrants, were noted; one seen and photographed by my son-in-law Bill Hollingworth, visiting Crocus flowers in his Quorn garden on 4 March and the other was present in LWP's Rothley garden on the 15th.

The first **Small Tortoiseshell** *Aglais urticae* reported was noted by HB on 6 March at Spinney Hill Park in Leicester and during the rest of the month it was found in small numbers at a dozen additional localities with a maximum of nine on 25th at Rothley.

The **Peacock** *Inachis io* which had a very poor summer was only reported seen in eight separate localities. Most sightings were of ones and twos in gardens but 12 were seen at Rothley on the 25th and five at Cossington Meadows NR on the 26th.

The first **Comma** *Polygonia c-album* out of hibernation was seen in PJD's Quorn garden on 9 March and later in five additional widely spread localities, all singletons except for two at Rothley on the 15th and ten on the 25th.

Peter Gamble

MOTHS

Just two people sent in moth records for this quarter, so again quite a sparse one, but a total of 159 individuals were recorded of 18 species, all adults to MV light except the only report of the mines of the **Firethorn Leaf-miner** *Phyllonorycter leucographella* from Loughborough at the end of March, a single **Common Plume** *Emmelina monodactyla* in early January and a solitary **White-shouldered House Moth** *Endrosis sarcitrella* in mid-March. Light trapping at Rothley began in mid-February and bravely continued regularly throughout the quarter. The list is in checklist order starting with another **White-shouldered House Moth** *Endrosis sarcitrella* in late March. Often called the **March Dagger**, *Diurnea fagella* started showing in late March and the last of the micro moths a single *Agonopterix heracliana* appeared on 11 March. The smart **Shoulder Stripe** *Anticlea badiata* was on the wing early in March and **Brindled Pug** *Eupithecia abbreviata* waited until mid-March. The usual candidates for this transitional period from the hard winter to early spring were all there, although most were in low numbers. **Pale-Brindled Beauty** *Phigalia pilosaria*, **Oak Beauty** *Biston strataria*, **Dotted Border** *Agriopis marginaria* appeared from mid-February to mid March. A group of moths we would be lost



Firethorn Leaf-miner © Steve Woodward

without are the *Orthosia* species, they may not be the prettiest of moths, but if they weren't there we would have some very meagre nights indeed earlier on in the year. The first *Orthosia*s started showing on 2 March and were still well in evidence at the end of March. **Small Quaker** *Orthosia cruda*, **Common Quaker** *Orthosia cerasi*, **Clouded Drab** *Orthosia incerta* were all multi night visitors with the latter showing on eight nights. A single **Twin-spotted Quaker** *Orthosia munda* showed for just one night and then **Hebrew Character** *Orthosia gothica* was around for seven nights and in significant numbers with 12 on 25 March, 14 on 23 March and 39 on 25 March. Always a nice moth to see is **Early Grey** *Xylocampa areola* when four individuals were present on 25 March plus a single **Satellite** *Eupsilia transversa* the same night. The last species to mention is a solitary **Chestnut** *Conistra vaccinii*. This species has a very prolonged flight period and occurs from September through to May and can even be seen on the "milder" nights in the dead of winter.

Many thanks for the non-wilting enthusiasm of the two contributors for this period.

Graham and Anona Finch

BEETLES

A first glance at the numbers compared to this quarter for last year suggest we have been quite lazy, although I admit we did have one less recorder (five in 2016 compared to four in 2017). The 965 individuals of 101 species fall well short of the 1948 individuals of 125 species for last year. 18 of these records were made in January, just one record for February and the other 149 records were all from March.

A summary of the list is as follows: a single *Carabus granulatus* was found under the bark of a dead tree lying on the ground at Loughborough Big Meadows (LBM from now on) at the beginning of January. The pitfall traps in Bradgate Park continue to catch *Carabus nemoralis* this being the only site this species seems to get recorded from recently. A total of 32 Carabids were recorded compared to 45 in last year's quarter, a few of the more notable species include *Asaphidion curtum* sieved from leaf litter at night from Charnwood Lodge and *Bembidion doris* sieved from reed tussocks at Mountsorrel, both as singletons. Sieving grass tussocks at Lea Meadows and Kelham Bridge produced two and three *Trichocellus placidus* respectively and *Acupalpus dubius* was found to be quite widespread with 27 individuals from five sites. The only true water beetle found was a solitary *Helochares punctatus* sieved from wet moss beside the trackside pond at Charnwood Lodge. A few millipede and woodlouse individuals had fallen into the pitfall traps at Bradgate Park and died and I wonder if it was these that attracted a single *Catops fuliginosus*. The Staphylinid numbers were also down 35 this year as opposed to 43 for last year, starting off with a single *Anthobium unicolor* under a dead deer corpse at Bradgate Park and the similar looking *Olophrum piceum* from several sites, all on the Charnwood Forest. Similar in shape to the previous and not really looking like a Staph at all eight *Proteinus brachypterus* were in pitfall traps at Bradgate Park in early March.

In the subfamily Tachyporinae and looking slightly more Staph-like was a single *Sepedophilus marshami* sieved from a reed and grass tussock on Mountsorrel Meadows in mid March and *S. nigripennis* sieved from a

grass tussock at Measham in mid January. Still with the Tachyporinae *Tachyporus dispar* was recorded at various sites all on the Charnwood Forest, *Tachyporus hypnorum* only at Lea Meadows and *Tachyporus obtusus* was found to be quite widespread. The closely related *Tachinus rufipes* was found at Charnwood Lodge, and *Anotylus rugosus* was again widespread, all the records for this subfamily came from sieving reed and grass tussocks. A total of nine species of the charismatic genus *Stenus* were recorded, with a small red spot on each elytron *Stenus bimaculatus* were found at Kelham Bridge and Lount Meadow. *S. clavicornis* was the most widely recorded of the group, *S. juno*, *lustrator*, *boops*, *brunipes*, *cicindeloides* and *pallipes* were all recorded as singletons and all from either the Charnwood Forest or the North West district. The next two, Staph species are quite extraordinary in looking very much like ants, although they do not seem to have any association with them, but both linked to wet and damp areas. The first two *Rugilus erichsonii* were sieved from a grass tussock beside the stream and *R. rufipes* was found in wet areas at Mountsorrel and Spring Cottage Fisheries near Moira. Another species of wet mire and marsh is *Lathrobium* (was *Tetartopeus*) *terminatus* where a singleton was sieved from wet moss besides the pool at Charnwood Lodge, halfway along the main track to the buildings, this species was also found at Spring Cottage Fisheries. This same site produced the only *Lathrobium elongatum* and Mountsorrel Meadows the only *Lathrobium geminum*. Just two, and probably the easiest of the Philonthia species were recorded they were *Philonthia cognatus* which has the underside of the first antennal segment yellow, with the rest of the antennae all black. So there is an obvious two-tone yellow and black first segment, easily visible with a low power hand lens. The second *Philonthus marginatus* which has a fairly broad deep reddish orange edge to the pronotum, both species are quite large, approx. 1 cm long.

The Spring Cottage Fisheries site in the northwest has added a quite nice selection of species, although the site itself is outside the modern county boundary but inside the VC county boundary, so it is within our recording range, but one of those areas we lost to

Derbyshire in more recent changes. Another species from this site was a single *Gabrius breviventer* also of damp and wet grassland. A solitary large brown *Ocypus aeneocephalus* was found at Charnwood Lodge. Very similar to the Philonthus are the Quedius with 45 species in the genus, *Quedius curtipennis* was at several sites but *Q. umbrinus* was only found at Charnwood Lodge. Quite a smart species *Othius punctulatus* with reddish legs and elytra contrasting with the rest which is black and very shiny, a singleton was in one of the pitfall traps at Bradgate Park end of March. Nearly finishing the Staphs are *Gyrohypnus angustatus* and *G. fracticornis* singles of each and both from the garden in Ibstock. Two quite similar to the above are *Xantholinus linearis* and *X. longiventris* both species were sieved from grass tussocks and leaf litter.

The only dung beetle recorded was a single *Aphodius sphacelatus* from deer dung at Bradgate Park. Fairly unusual for a click beetle was a solitary *Hypnoidus riparius* sieved from flood debris beside the River Lin in Bradgate Park, often found under stones at the edges of various watercourses. Not that often found, there are just 20 previous records for this species in VC55. The only other "click" was *Agriotes lineatus* sieved from grass tussocks at several sites. The tiny blue/green Nitidulid *Meligethes aeneus* started to put in an appearance from early March beaten from flowering Gorse at Charnwood Lodge and then quite widespread particularly on any yellow flowers, but also on sunny days in numbers on white bed sheets on the washing line at Ibstock. The small but distinctive *Psammoecus bipustulatus* was sieved from grass and reed tussocks besides water bodies at Kelham Bridge, Mountsorrel and Spring Cottage Fisheries. The even smaller *Micrambe ulicis* continued to be beaten from where ever flowering Gorse is found, often in 100's. The first of the Ladybirds beginning with a single *Rhizobius chrysomeloides* sieved from grass tussock at Kelham Bridge in early March, also found using the same method were *Coccidula rufa* at various sites. Sieving mixed grass/reed tussocks produced **22-spot Ladybird *Psyllobora vigintiduopunctata*** and **14-spot Ladybird *Coccinella quattuordecimpunctata*** both from Mountsorrel in mid-March. No surprise, the

7-spot Ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata* was the most frequently found species but just a single **Eyed Ladybird *Anatis ocellata*** from Charnwood Lodge, the last Ladybird recorded was **16-spot Ladybird *Tytthaspis sedecimpunctata*** from Mountsorrel and LBM. Over 200 ***Omanadus floralis*** were beat from old drying out hay bales from a roadside field at Lount.

Oulema are a notoriously difficult genus and dissection is recommended as a definitive means for a positive identification. ***Oulema melanopus*** were found at Measham and Spring Cottage Fisheries with ***Oulema obscura*** at LBM, all were confirmed by dissection. A solitary ***Galerucella tenella*** was sieved from grass tussocks at Spring Cottage Lakes and the similar, but twice the size ***Lochmaea suturalis*** sieved from wet moss at Charnwood Lodge. ***Altica lythri*** were found at Mountsorrel and Lount, then back to Spring Cottage Fisheries for the small but dazzling metallic green and scarlet, Willow feeder ***Crepidodera aurata***.

Beating Gorse flowers at this time of year can be quite productive for half a dozen regular species and the tiny blackish weevil with pale green flecks giving a striped look ***Exapion ulicis*** is guaranteed and can be found in dozens at a single beat, Charnwood Lodge produced the largest numbers of up to 50 at a time. With the characteristic short thick rostrum of the genus, nine ***Oxystoma subulatum*** were found near Moira. The very different looking ***Notaris acridulus*** were fairly widespread but just a single record of ***Notaris scirpi*** was found at Spring Cottage Fisheries. The most widespread weevil was ***Sitona lineatus*** found everywhere, whether beating and/or sieving. A similar looking but with long gangly legs was a solitary ***Andrion regensteinense*** sieved from wet moss beside the roadside pond at Charnwood Lodge. Moving on to a different Weevil genus with ***Ceutorhynchus erysmi*** beaten from Gorse at Charnwood Lodge, and the **Cabbage Stem Weevil *Ceutorhynchus pallidactylus*** was found on several occasions, but only from Ibstock. It cannot be missed that sieving various mediums, particularly grass and reed litter have produced the bulk of the records for this quarter, I suspect the next quarter will be quite different and beating and sweeping will take

over, together with a little host plant searching, oh yes, and not forgetting searching through dung.

Many thanks, to the hardworking recorders for this quarter.

Graham Finch

OTHER INSECTS

Diptera

A few **Dark-edged Bee-flies *Bombylius major*** were seen in late March the bulk of which appeared in the following month. Singles were noted at Quorn, Warwick Avenue on the 25th and Quorn War Memorial on the 30th. The only other records submitted were by SFW and HI from Stonesby Quarry, three on the 26th, with further singles at Groby, Sheet Hedges Wood and Oadby, all in late March.

Just a single Hoverfly was noted in March, an ***Episyrphus balteatus*** in HI's Woodhouse garden on March 23th, with one also in my garden on the same date. This species I have on occasion seen in March, almost certainly out of hibernation, some species can be very dark at this period.

Hymenoptera

The **Buff-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus terrestris*** was, as usual, widely reported in this quarter, with the earliest queen reported on 29 February from Barlestone with queens frequently seen from this site during March and also from Loughborough, Spinney Hill Park, Evington Park, Quorn, Seagrave, Stonesby, Stoughton, Oadby, Seagrave, Woodhouse Eaves and Swinford.

As both *B. terrestris* and *B. lucorum* agg. workers have white "tails" it is difficult to tell them apart, so early workers, almost certainly *B. terrestris*, were reported from Quorn, two workers on the 7th, with single workers from Barlestone with full pollen on several dates in March foraging winter flowering Heather.

I failed to see any **Red-tailed Bumblebees *Bombus lapidarius*** this quarter, a few however were reported, with queens from Barlestone on the 17th March and to the end of the month, one with full pollen on the 31st. Other queens were seen at Woodhouse on the 17th, Groby

on the 30th, with one at Quorn on the 28th.

Queens of the **Tree Bumblebee *Bombus hypnorum*** were active in March with records from Knighton, Evington Park, Groby, Stonesby Village and Quarry, Stoughton, Barlestone, with single queens with pollen on the 30th and 31st and two queens at Quorn on the 14th, with several queens present on the 14th. What a boost this bumblebee has been in recent years to our depleted stock of native bees.

Fewer **White-tailed Bumblebees *Bombus lucorum* agg.** were seen this quarter, with queens sighted at Barlestone, Garthorpe and a Woodhouse garden during March.

Even fewer records of the **Garden Bumblebee *Bombus hortorum***, the only record submitted was a queen at Barlestone on March 16th and 29th.

Early-nesting Bumblebee *Bombus pratorum* was also slow to emerge, with queens noted at Barlestone, Woodhouse, Quorn and Abney Street, all singles during March, with one at Warwick Avenue in Quorn on the 21st February, foraging Iris.

A few **Hive Bees *Apis mellifera*** were reported at Quorn from Feb 20th, numbers built up to many by March 23rd, small numbers elsewhere, with numbers becoming common at Castle Gardens by the 15th of the month.

Social Wasps

Queens of the **Common Wasp *Vespula vulgaris*** were noted at Seagrave and Groby on 19 & 28 March respectively. Another was seen in St Peters Road in Leicester on 26 March.

As this is a rather short report I shall be reporting on the few solitary bee records by HI and SFW and yours truly that we have for this period. As usual the **Hairy-footed Flower Bee *Anthophora plumipes***, was the first to be sighted, with the first males at Spinney Hill Park on March 4th, most males by the middle of March at Quorn, Abney Street, Loughborough Great Central Railway Station and Seagrave, with females recorded to the end of the month at Quorn War Memorial, Shenton Estate, Stonesby and Spinney Hill Park and probably elsewhere. This common bee has quite a long foraging season, females in my garden usually to mid-May. When there is very little else about

this bee will be busy. Certainly the commonest solitary bee in many habitats, particularly in urban areas such as mine, where its constant buzz can lighten the quietest of periods.

Other records, Spinney Hill Park; ***Andrena haemorrhoa***, female with full pollen scopa, on 28 March, ***Andrena chrysoceles***, a mating pair in the border on the same date, with several females foraging Dandelion on the 30th and a single male ***Andrena bicolor*** in Castle Gardens on 15 March. Two **Tawny Mining Bees *Andrena fulva*** were in FTS's Barlestone garden on 28 March with three soil mounds and by 31st there were ten mounds. Two more were seen by the G U Canal in Loughborough on 29 March.

Howard Bradshaw & Helen Ikin

FLOWERING PLANTS and FERNS

Fourth Quarter 2016

A very mild autumn which saw many plants flowering beyond their normal time.

Not many records for this quarter as one would expect but a few observations. Is it my imagination or the fact that I do not roam as far as I used to in search of plants but the **Oxford Ragwort *Senecio squalidus*** seems to be less common than it used to be and some of the taller yellow-flowered crucifers also seem less common too? On the other hand, **Green Alkanet *Pentaglottis sempervirens*** seems to be appearing everywhere.

I have also noticed recently that a lot of weeds which used to appear in the town centre at the base of walls or in cracks seem to have disappeared to a great extent. (If anyone can enlighten me as to the truth of this observation, I would be very grateful).

Plants of Interest 2016 Q4

Wood Horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum*: noted in Owston Big Wood. A rather attractive plant which is uncommon in the county, found only in the North West. I think we are lucky to have it as it is rare in central England.

Midland Hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*: The less common of the two native hawthorns was found at Ashby Folville. Very similar but usually has two styles whereas the Common Hawthorn has only one. The leaves are less deeply lobed

and the surface is shinier. Having said that, there are so many hybrids between the two, it is sometimes difficult to determine which it is.

Dwarf Mallow *Malva neglecta*: A prostrate annual with pink flowers was at Cropston. One of the wayside weeds I mentioned earlier which also seems to be less common.

Duke of Argyll's Tea Plant *Lycium barbarum*: A spiny spreading shrub found usually in hedges was seen at Ashby Folville; usually commoner near the sea. The Leicestershire Flora states that it sometimes marks the site of a cottage long demolished.

Gladdon or Stinking Iris *Iris foetidissima*: found at Great Glen, this is a rare plant in the county mainly occurring in places where it has escaped cultivation or in woodland. [*We find it quite often in churchyards. Ed.*]

Also called the Roast Beef Plant because of the acrid and rather foetid smell of the leaves when crushed. The flowers are not very showy but the seeds when the pods open in winter are bright orange-red and are very attractive.

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First Quarter 2017

A mild winter following a mild autumn meant many plants flowered before their normal time, especially bulbs. Early flowering shrubs and trees also had splendid displays of blossom.

The main feature of this quarter was the lack of rain causing problems, especially for early annuals.

Plants of Interest 2017 Q1

Rusty-back Fern *Asplenium ceterach*: located on the wall of a bridge at Bradgate Park.

Greater Celandine *Chelidonium majus*: several records were received. A plant found throughout the county, usually near habitations as it was formerly cultivated mainly, I think, for its use to get rid of warts. Another name for it is Swallow-wort as it starts to flower when the swallows arrive and finishes when they leave. There is a well-known story that Pliny said the swallow used the juice of this plant to anoint the blind eyes of their nestlings to give them sight.

Goldilocks *Ranunculus auricomus*: noted on a roadside bank at Woodhouse.

WEATHER

January was the coolest month since 2013 and the driest since 2012. January this year was dominated by areas of high pressure close to the British Isles. This had the effect of diverting our usual rain-bearing fronts both south and north and left us with a lot of quiet and still weather with below average rainfall and sunshine figures. Afternoon temperatures averaged 6.4°C which was 0.7°C below average. Night time temperatures averaged 1.4°C which was 0.3°C below normal. The average temperature of 3.9°C was 0.5°C below the norm. The high pressure meant a lot of cold and clear nights with Barrow recording 17 frosts and Mountsorrel with 14. Rain fell on just 15 days in the month and significantly on only just four. The total rainfall at Mountsorrel was 47 mm and at Barrow 44 mm, which is 20% below normal. The total sunshine was 60 hours, nearly 10% below normal.

The month began wet with 10 mm falling at Barrow but the first areas of high pressure built up through the first week. The high moved SW and winds turned SW bringing us some warmer air. The warmest day of the month was recorded on the 11th when the temperature peaked at 11.1°C. Winds briefly turned northerly, giving us an arctic air flow and some sleet and snow showers on the 12th and 13th. The snow did not amount to much and soon cleared away. The weather then became quiet again with more cold and frosty nights with the month's lowest temperature of -5.3°C being recorded on the 26th. Once again we avoided a major snowfall.

February continued the pattern of this winter and delivered another mild and dull month with rainfall close to average. Afternoon temperatures were logged at 8.4°C which is 1°C higher than normal, while nights were very mild, averaging 3.9°C which is 2.5°C more than we would expect. There were only two night frosts recorded instead of the usual eleven. Rainfall varied between the two featured stations with 55 mm recorded at Mountsorrel with just 44 mm being logged at Barrow upon Soar. The average for the month of February is 48 mm. There were 12 days when significant rainfall fell. It was another dull month with just

Rue-leaved Saxifrage *Saxifraga tridactylites*: was found in Morcott village and in King Street in Loughborough which is a very unusual site for this little plant – easily seen in very dry weather as it turns bright red.

Caper Spurge *Euphorbia lathyris*: found by the canal in Loughborough. A tall spurge but very poisonous, its seeds are large and round like peas. Fortunately it is not common.

Slender Sandwort *Arenaria leptoclados*: a small plant for which 69% of the records from the county are from railway ballast, a specimen was found at Morcott.

Creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*: located in St Mary's Churchyard at Waltham on the Wolds. A small plant found in wet or damp places. The map in the Leicestershire Flora makes it appear well distributed and not uncommon but I must admit I have not seen it very often. Smelling the flowers is supposed to cure headaches!

Buck's-horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus*: seen in Paudy Lane at Seagrave, another record for this little maritime plant.

Cut-leaved Dead-nettle *Lamium hybridum*: four plants were noted on grassy road margins in Ethel Road in Leicester.

Henbit Dead-nettle *Lamium amplexicaule*: one plant was on the pavement margin in Sparkenhoe Street in Leicester.

Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*: in Sheet Hedges Wood - eight shoots of this unusual parasite. The shoots were barely out of the ground and most of them on the quarry side of the fence. According to the Leicestershire Flora almost every record for this species is from the eastern part of the county but it states that it is locally frequent in Sheet Hedges Wood.

Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*: a plant at the back of Towles Offices adjacent to the Grand Union Canal in Loughborough; a most unusual location!

Eric Webster

OTHER RECORDS

Records have also been received for:

Ants, molluscs, galls, millipedes, groundhoppers, woodlice, mosses, lichens, liverworts and fungi.

58 hours of sun recorded which is 25% below normal.

February, like the other winter months this season, had a lot of dry and settled weather with areas of high pressure close by. Most of the time, the high was to the south bringing us mild SW winds and plenty of cloud. The month began mild and wet but, by the 5th, things were changing as our high pressure switched position to Scandinavia and we pulled in some colder air from the east. Fortunately, the air arriving was not too cold and we had a few days with temperatures in low single figures with the 9th being our coldest day with just 2°C on the thermometer. Our coldest night was recorded by Ken Hickling on the 6th in Barrow upon Soar at -4°C. Snow showers did fall for the next few days but they did not amount to much and there was no accumulation of snow. The second half of the month was much milder and the 20th saw our mildest February day for three years when 15.2°C was reached on the 20th. The 23rd saw our most dramatic weather of the whole winter as storm Doris roared across Northern England and gave us the strongest winds since February 2014 with gusts of wind up to 67 mph at East Midlands Airport and 62 mph recorded at the agricultural college at Sutton Bonington. I also recorded 60 mph at Mountsorrel and the strength of the wind caused quite a lot of damage in a short space of time. Doris quickly moved away and the month ended like most of the winter before it in a mostly mild but quiet manner. Only four winters have been milder than this one since the Millennium and it was the driest winter since 2011/12 and the dullest winter since 2010. This winter is now the fourth consecutive one without a substantial cold spell. We have to go back to the winter of 2012/13 to see any significant snowfall. So, we can now look forward to spring, hopefully, as long as the weather does not have any tricks up its sleeve!

March proved to be an exceptionally mild month indeed. With a mean temperature of 9°C it was the third warmest month in the midlands since records began in 1659! Only March 1938 and March 1957 had higher figures than this one. Afternoon temperatures were logged at 12.6°C, 2.4°C above normal as mild Atlantic air blew across us for the majority of

the month. Night time temperatures were logged at 5.5°C which is again 2.4°C above the norm. Even more remarkable was the there was no air frost recorded at all. This is the first time this has happened in more than 100 years! Rainfall totals were close to normal with 50 mm falling in Mountsorrel with Ken in Barrow upon Soar recording 47 mm. Winds mainly stayed in a westerly direction and this brought us mild Atlantic air. The maximum gust on the 19th was 40 mph. I recorded 132 hours of sunshine in March, 10% above normal.

The month began on a damp note with my wettest day producing 9 mm on the 3rd. The 1st also produced our coolest night of the month at 1.5°C. From the 12th to the 16th high pressure took charge and the weather was mild and dry. The third week was unsettled but mild. The final few days of the month brought the warmest weather with 20°C recorded on the 30th a maximum temperature which should be expected in June. This temperature was the warmest March day since 2012. So once again another very mild month for all of us which continued the pattern set in the winter. The weather does have a habit of evening itself out eventually so I am expecting Easter to be cooler with a NW wind with just a few showers but sunny intervals too.

Phil Morrish

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Heritage has been compiled from records submitted by the following members and friends:

H Bradshaw, B Croxtall, R Dandy, E J Darby,
P J Darby, M A Finch, G L Finch, D B Forgham,
P H Gamble, J Graham, S C Graham, D Gray,
C Green, J Green, B Hollingworth, H Ikin,
A T Onions, D A Perry, L W Purnell,
H Shacklock, F T Smith, E P Tromans,
S F Woodward.

We are grateful to them all.

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