

BRITISH NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION
Hertfordshire Branch

BULLETIN No.135



70th Anniversary Celebration – September 2016



Checking 'refugia' and finding Slow-worms
Bayfordbury – 17th September 2016



Looking for lichens
Panshanger Park – 29th October 2016

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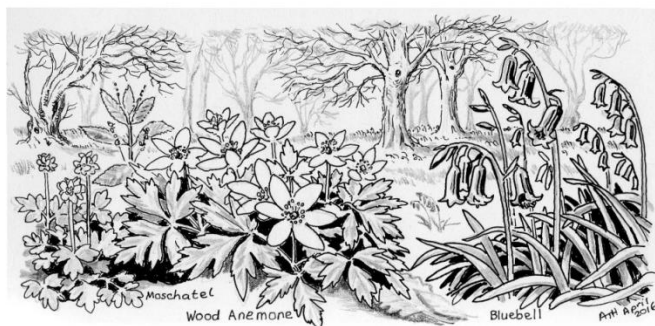
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EDITOR'S BIT

It seems to have become a habit of mine to compile the Bulletin at this time of year and I am writing this in the warmth of indoors, with a rather frosty winter scene outdoors, similar to the view shown below, sketched a few years ago. The scene is one of a bleak windswept Hertfordshire landscape reduced to its basic elements by autumn storms. But there is an element of life there with the birds, catkins are already dangling long and bulbs just striking up beneath the fallen leaves. The cycle of life comes around again and so does the Bulletin.

Last year was the 70th anniversary of the Branch and this Bulletin begins with a report of the special anniversary meeting at Bayfordbury. We have a long tradition of the study of natural history in our county and you can read a summary of an excellent talk given by Revd. Tom Gladwin last February on late Georgian and Victorian naturalists. Our field meetings continue in this spirit and provide an important insight into the changing fortunes of wildlife. For instance the Marsh Tit pictured in the scene was once common enough, but we now count it lucky to see one. Our walks carry on the tradition of natural history study and knowledge gained helps us to appreciate the challenges faced by our wildlife in our county. So we are grateful for all who have led them, particularly to those for whom this was their first time as leader.



MEETING REPORTS- 2016 (continued)

HERTS BRANCH 70th ANNIVERSARY WILDLIFE DAY BAYFORDBURY

By kind permission of the University of Hertfordshire.

Saturday 17th September

We had some 18 members turn up for this rather special day, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of our Branch of BNA, shortly after World War II. At that time, we were called the 'North Middlesex Branch', and most members were based around Enfield and Barnet! Over the years, we became first the 'Hertfordshire and North Middx Branch', then the Hertfordshire Branch, as our centre of gravity shifted ever northwards in the face of London expansion.

We met after lunch at the Science block at the Bayfordbury campus of the University of Hertfordshire. The plan for the afternoon was to first explore the grounds of the University, then move across to Rough Hills nearby before returning to the building for a buffet supper and talks.

The immediate grounds of the Science building are not without interest. The grassland is calcareous, there are old fruit trees, scrub, conifers etc., and a recently-created small pond (we did not visit the larger lake over the drive to the north). Unfortunately, the weather was rather dull, so wildlife was subdued, except for two Ring-necked Parakeets flying round the grounds! We also heard a Moorhen on the lake. A few of us did a bit of sweeping for late insects. As it happened, one of the first to appear was a very small ladybird in the genus *Scymnus*, which later turned out to be a first County record of *S. rubromaculatus*, only recently found in the UK! Some flea-beetles were the rather local *Longitarsus atricillus*, while some minute beetles scurrying about in dried grass heaps turned out to be *Sericoderus brevicornis*, also not that long first-recorded in Britain, but now widespread. Dan Asaw found a rove beetle under refuse by the car park, which was *Quedius levicollis*, and other obscure beetles in the cut grass included *Corticaria punctulata*, not that common. We also found a Common Toad by the Science block.

At the pond, we examined the rather confusing array of plants present – no doubt the result of deliberate introduction. One of these, which seemed to be doing quite well, was a *Cyperus* species – identified as *C. esculentus* by Sonja Kaupe, who is familiar with it in Europe, where it can be a menace. Other plants included Grey Club-rush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*, as well as its relative Common Club-rush *S. lacustris* (rather incongruous in such a small habitat!), and unfortunately also a good stand of the invasive Parrot's-feathers *Myriophyllum aquaticum*.

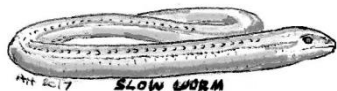
We moved off towards Rough Hills, seeing the usual Red Kite waft overhead, some 100 Rooks/Jackdaws feeding on the fields and a small flock of Starlings(nice to see these days). At Rough Hills, we explored the mix of rough grassland in the open glades and some of the scrub, as well as looking at a few of the old pollarded oaks, and then exploring a corner of Sailor's Grove, before re-tracing our steps beside the railway. On one of the old pollards near the entrance, we came across a fine clump of the bracket-fungus *Meripilus giganteus* as well as some Beefsteak fungus *Fistulina hepatica*, and William Bishop found the larva of the Red-headed Cardinal Beetle *Pyrochroa serraticornis* under bark on a log. The *Meripilus* was home to several fungus-beetles: *Mycetophagus quadripustulatus*.

Out in the grass glades, we found several 'refugia' – sheets of flooring material laid down by University staff to attract reptiles and amphibians – and under one of these, we came across a pair of Slow-worms (which were expected here). Sweeping the tall, rough grass and scrub margins in the glades produced some interesting insects, notably the rather fine, blue weevil *Involvulus caeruleus*, found on Blackthorn by Simon Knott, and the grass-feeding ground-beetle *Curtonotus aulicus*, found by Dan. In the woodland, William came across the snail-eating beetle *Silpha atrata*, while Dan came across another ground beetle by a small, shaded pond: *Asaphidion curtum*, which is quite local. Birds were quiet, but did include a Coal Tit.

Back at the Science block, June Crew and I gave a couple of short talks about BNA and its activities over the years. Needless to say, June's picture show was peppered with amusing photos of people doing the most extraordinary things. We hope the Branch carries on doing so for many more years to come!

We would also like to thank especially Chantal Helm and Ian Flack of the University, who were our 'minders' for the visit and made the facilities available for our special day.

Birds: Red Kite, Moorhen, Wood Pigeon, Ring-necked Parakeet, Robin, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Starling, Rook, Jackdaw.



Herptiles: Slow-worm, Common Toad.

Trevor James

BURY GREEN, LITTLE HADHAM

Saturday 1st October

4 members

The day started off well, but later became rather gloomy, and eventually turned to rain. Perhaps because folk had looked at the weather forecast, we only had a meagre turn-out, but those who didn't come missed out on quite a good day, nevertheless.

We met at Bury Green – now rather a 'posh' area, but still with old trees and village ponds etc. Ivy blossom was buzzing with insects: Honey Bees, Common Wasps, and the hoverflies *Eristalis tenax* and *Myathropa florea*, among others. Butterflies were in evidence: Red Admiral and Comma. We heard a Green Woodpecker nearby, a Goldcrest was singing, a small party of Long-tailed Tits threaded along one hedgerow, the first of many Chiffchaffs appeared, and we even found a colony of House Sparrows. Hedge Bindweed by the Green at one point was found to be infested with the flea-beetle *Longitarsus rubiginosus*.

Our route took us south and eastwards towards Stocking Wood, along a path we had followed not long previously in summer. Parties of 40-50 House Martins, with a few Swallows, were passing over rapidly, flying before the oncoming clouds, as we descended towards the stream below the wood. I made a note of a self-sown Walnut *Juglans regia*, which is becoming increasingly frequent. On a clump of Broad-leaved Dock, I also spotted the bright red weevil *Apion frumentarium*.

At Stocking Wood, apart from a Dunnock, the only real interest was a fine

specimen of Beefsteak fungus *Fistulina hepatica* growing from a dead oak tree by the path. Our path led along the south side of the wood, and then east and north towards Great Plantings Wood, as rain began to fall. There were a few Yellowhammers in the hedgerow, as well as several more Chiffchaffs, a flying Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Kestrel.

The path led us under the A120 towards Hadham Lodge, where the rain eventually eased off again. An old ash tree by the track had the white-rot fungus *Inonotus hispidus*, which is not great news for the tree, but which harboured the obscure fungus-beetle *Pseudotriphyllus suturalis*, not supposed to be common, but widespread in Herts. A Nuthatch called at High Wood, before we struck off towards the path through Bloodhounds Wood. The path only cuts across the southern end of this wood, so we did not explore much of it, but enough to find a pair of Marsh Tits and a mating pair of brachypterous Lygaeid bugs that Simon Knott later identified as *Stygnocoris rusticus*, apparently the first in Herts. since about 1960!

The path westwards from the wood followed rather overgrown, thin hedgerows towards Hadham Hall. With the now dull and still rather damp, windy weather, everything was a bit quiet, although a Buzzard flew over and numbers of Skylarks were passing across. A log by a copse sheltered the ground beetle *Leistus spinibarbis*. At Hadham Hall, we inspected the old pond and reservoir. The former evidently has quite clean water supplies, so sported a good quantity of Ivy Duckweed *Lemna trisulca*, as well as Floating Pondweed *Potamogeton natans*; while the reservoir had a Grey Heron, Moorhens etc.

We made our way towards Little Hadham Church and noted Bullfinch, before finding some disturbed ground, with a plant of Broad-leaved Spurge *Euphorbia platyphyllos*, which is quite a rarity these days. There was also some Common Cudweed *Filago vulgaris*, anything but common. Beyond the A120 again, our path took us towards the north end of Muggins Wood, and here we saw a Sand Martin flying over on migration, with more House Martins. More Yellowhammers, some Black-headed Gulls and a Pied Wagtail were in evidence as well. The final, rather long trudge back to Bury Green produced a few extra birds: three Mistle Thrushes, a Coal Tit and Collared Doves, but little else.

Birds: Grey Heron, Buzzard, Kestrel, Pheasant, Moorhen, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Swallow, House Martin, Sand Martin, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Marsh Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Wren, Dunnock, Pied Wagtail, Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, House Sparrow.

Mammals: Grey Squirrel.

Butterflies: Commas, Red Admiral.

Hymenoptera: *Apis mellifera*, *Vespula vulgaris*.

Hemiptera: *Stygnocoris rusticus*

Diptera: *Eristalis tenax*, *Myathropa florea* (right).

Coleoptera: *Apion frumentarium*, *Epuraea melanocephala* (at Stocking Wood), *Harmonia axyridis* (Harlequin Ladybird), *Leistus spinibarbis*, *Longitarsus rubiginosus*, *Pseudotriphyllus suturalis*.

Flora of note: *Euphorbia platyphyllos*, *Filago vulgaris*, *Juglans regia*, *Lemna trisulca*, *Potamogeton natans*.

Fungi: *Fistulina hepatica*, *Inonotus hispidus*.



Trevor James

MARDLEY HEATH, for fungi

Saturday 15th October

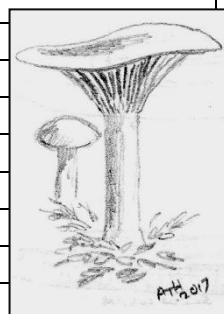
12 members, 1 visitor

This meeting was programmed as a half-day so that some of the members could attend the AGM of the Herts Natural History Society in the afternoon. Mardley Heath has plenty to interest the naturalist and is well-known as a good location for fungi so it was with high hopes that we set off from the car park.

The nature reserve is divided into two halves by a road and within each half is a range of woodland types. Around the margins are the remains of historic oak/hornbeam woodland which include some planting of sweet chestnut, beech and sycamore. Inside the edges are the irregular shaped pits left behind when gravel extraction ceased in the 1960s. The pits were never restored so these areas are now a humpy-bumpy landscape covered in maturing birch woodland broken up by several open glades. Our route

included short, rabbit-grazed grassland, longer grassland on restored landfill, birch woodland within the two main pit areas, mature oak/hornbeam, a large open pit containing a mosaic of gorse, heather and birch scrub with occasional young oak trees and more mixed woodland. With only a half-day to spend in the reserve and with the usual challenges of herding the foraying group, it was a minor miracle that we all returned to the car park in good time and without losing anyone.

| Latin Name | English Name |
|---|------------------------------|
| <i>Agaricus campestris</i> | Field Mushroom |
| <i>Amanita muscaria</i> | Fly Agaric |
| <i>Amanita rubescens</i> | The Blusher |
| <i>Clitocybe phyllophila</i> | Frosty Funnel |
| <i>Conocybe</i> sp.(subovalis?) | A Conecap |
| <i>Coprinellus micaceus</i> | Glistening Inkcap |
| <i>Coprinus comatus</i> | Shaggy Inkcap / Lawyer's Wig |
| <i>Cortinarius</i> sp. (<i>Telamonia</i> group) | |
| <i>Cortinarius</i> sp (poss. <i>betuletorum</i>) | Birch Webcap? |
| <i>Cystoderma amianthemum</i> | Earthy Powdercap |
| <i>Entoloma rhodopolium</i> | Wood Pinkgill |
| <i>Hebeloma crustuliniforme</i> | Poison Pie |
| <i>Hemimycena lactea</i> | Milky Bonnet |
| <i>Hygrocybe conica</i> | Blackening Waxcap |
| <i>Hypholoma fasciculare</i> | Sulphur Tuft |
| <i>Inocybe geophylla</i> var <i>geophylla</i> | White Fibrecap |
| <i>Inocybe</i> sp. (poss <i>maculata</i>) | Frosty Fibrecap? |
| <i>Laccaria laccata</i> | The Deceiver |
| <i>Lactarius pyrogalus</i> | Fiery Milkcap |
| <i>Lactarius tabidus</i> | Birch Milkcap |
| <i>Lactarius torminosus</i> | Woolly Milkcap |
| <i>Lactarius turpis</i> | Ugly Milkcap |
| <i>Lyophyllum decastes</i> | Clustered Domecap |
| <i>Marasmiellus ramealis</i> | Twig Parachute |
| <i>Mycena aetites</i> | Drab Bonnet |
| <i>Mycena vitilis</i> | Snapping Bonnet |
| <i>Panaeolus</i> sp.(<i>acuminatus</i> ?) | Dewdrop Mottlegill? |



| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Parasola plicatilis</i> | Pleated Inkcap (Little Jap Umbrella) |
| <i>Paxillus involutus</i> | The Rollrim |
| <i>Pholiota squarrosa</i> | Shaggy Scalycap |
| <i>Psathyrella conopilus</i> | Conical Brittlestem |
| <i>Psathyrella multipedata</i> | Clustered Brittlestem |
| <i>Psathyrella piluliformis</i> | Common Stump Brittlestem |
| <i>Russula cyanoxantha</i> | Charcoal Burner |
| <i>Russula cyanoxantha var peltereaui</i> | (with beautiful dark green cap) |
| <i>Russula exalbicans</i> | Bleached Brittlegill |
| <i>Russula foetens</i> | Stinking Brittlegill |
| <i>Russula sp. (heterophylla?)</i> | Greasy Green Brittlegill (sm. fragment only) |
| <i>Russula ochroleuca</i> | Ochre Brittlegill |
| <i>Stropharia aeruginosa</i> | Verdigris Roundhead |
| <i>Tricholoma fulvum</i> | Birch Knight |
| | |
| <i>Calvatia gigantea</i> | Giant Puffball (shrunken specimen!) |
| <i>Clavulinopsis helvola</i> | Yellow Club |
| <i>Daedaliopsis confragosa</i> | Blushing Bracket |
| <i>Daldinia concentric</i> | Cramp Balls / King Alfred's Cakes |
| <i>Diatrypella quercina (?)</i> | Oak Blackhead |
| <i>Ganoderma australe</i> | Southern Bracket |
| <i>Hypoxylon fragiforme</i> | Beech Woodward |
| <i>Meripilus giganteus</i> | Giant Polypore |
| <i>Polyporus betulinus</i> | Birch Bracket / Razorstrop |
| <i>Scleroderma citrinum</i> | Common Earthball |
| <i>Stereum hirsutum</i> | Hairy Curtain Crust |

Birds: Buzzard, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Redwing, Blackbird, Robin, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Marsh Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Goldcrest, Dunnock, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Wren, Starling, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Redpoll.

Amphibians: Common Frog.

Coleoptera (of note only): *Andrion regensteinense* (on Broom, south pit), *Chrysolina hyperici* (on *Hypericum perforatum*, north pit), *Cis bilamellatus* (in *Piptoporus betulinus*), *Cis castaneus* (det. G. Orledge) (in *Ganoderma* on beech, south side), *Exapion ulicis* (on Gorse, south pit), *Galeruca tanacetii* (tip area, found by C. Smith), *Longitarsus atricillus* (on *Epilobium*, north pit, found by J. Gray).

Flora (of note only): *Arctium nemorosum* (tip area), *Centaureum erythraea* (south pit), *Galeopsis bifida* (found by Alla Mashanova), *Echium pininana* (escape, south area, near gardens, found by Andrew Harris – **new to Herts.**), *Hypericum humifusum* (bare clearing near car park, found by A. Harris), *Hypericum x desetangii* (large patch near car park), *Iris foetidissima* (escape, by car park), *Mentha x villosa* (escape, near car park), *Plantago coronopus* (native colony) (bare area near car park), *Polygala serpyllifolia* (south pit, found by Chris James – one of two Herts. sites).

Trevor & Chris James

PANSHANGER PARK

Saturday 29th October

10 members

Our lichen expert, Andrew Harris, was taken ill and unable to lead this meeting so I happily agreed to take his place and point out a few lichens to BNA members. I arrived a little early in order to spend a while exploring and, along with helpful suggestions from other members, we soon had a plan for the day. Blakemore Wood was suggested as our first goal, as it is one of the oldest areas of woodland within the Park.

During my early exploration I picked up a twig from the ground and found the first lichen of the day: *Lecanora carpinea*, growing alongside one of the very common species, *Lecidella elaeochroma*. *L. carpinea* is distinctive because of the frosted appearance of the fruiting bodies and, although not rare, it is always pleasing to find. I showed the twig to members as we waited for any late-comers and William pointed out leaves from nearby Oak trees that had 'green islands'. These are caused by leaf miners that make burrows within the leaves and manage to isolate these areas from the autumn draw down of nutrients, thereby giving themselves the best chance of survival.

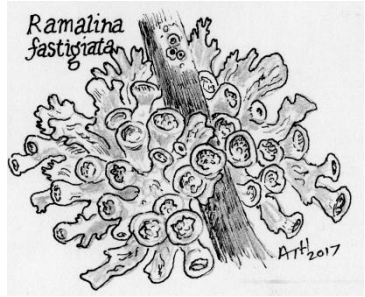
Our group of ten walked the short distance to Blakemore Wood and I noted two more common species of lichen on a Beech tree: *Physcia tenella* and *Arthonia radiata*. The *Physcia* specimen had a parasitic fungus growing on it and with a certain amount of concentration some of the group could make out the pink to buff-coloured gall-like fungus, with a name that helps to make up for its size: *Syzygospora physciacearum*.

As usual during BNA meetings, logs were being turned over and checked for anything that might be hidden underneath, before being carefully replaced. One log was protecting a young Toad as well as a Common Shrew. There were very few lichens to be seen in the wood due to the lack of light, and the trees were not old enough to have the relic communities from pre-Industrial Revolution times.

We heard William Bishop laughing and went to see what he had discovered. He was holding a beetle, *Silpha atrata*, that enjoys a diet of live snails and also produces an obnoxious smell to protect itself. This was a memorable moment for those of us who put our noses to the test. A dead tree stump in a clearing had a good covering of *Cladonia*, including *Cladonia coniocraea*, although I could have done with Andrew to help out with the identification of other species. Along with the *Cladonia* species there was a more readily recognised specimen of *Trapeliopsis flexuosa*. We quickly moved on from the stump as, between us, we had disturbed a wasps' nest and the wasps took revenge on William, who received two stings. We noted that there was a large population of Grey Squirrels in the wood and individuals were busy chasing each other.

A number of fungi were identified, including Shaggy Parasol *Chlorophyllum rhacodes*, False Death-cap *Amanita citrina*, Sulphur Tuft *Hypholoma fasciculare*, Oak Milk-cap *Lactarius quietus*, Rosy Bonnet *Mycena rosea*, Turkey-tails *Trametes versicolor*, Common Yellow Russula *Russula ochroleuca*, and Brown Roll-rim *Paxillus involutus*. June mentioned another fungus with the rather dubious name of The Ugly and the first entry on the Internet suggested a New Zealand horror film. However, I also found a mention of The Ugly Milk-cap *Lactarius turpis*. Two more fungi with interesting common names were recorded: Dog Stinkhorn *Mutinus caninus* and Wood Woolly-foot *Gymnopus peronatus*. A longhorn beetle, *Rhadium mordax*, was captured and there were comments that it was at least two months later in the season

than expected. I noted down a few more lichens in my notebook: *Xanthoria polycarpa*, *Candelariella reflexa*, *Ramalina fastigiata*, *Xanthoria parietina*, *Physcia adscendens*, *Phaeophyscia orbicularis* and *Melanelixia glabratula*, before the decision was made to leave the wood and explore a different area of the Park.



Before moving on, Trevor James called us over to see one more fungus, a Giant Polypore *Meripilus giganteus* growing at the base of a Beech tree. It was a splendid specimen that lived up to its name and several photographs were taken.

We walked along the edge of an arable field to reach a more central area of the Park and immediately noticed the high number of Harlequin Ladybirds, along with a few of our native Ten-spot Ladybirds. I noted another lichen: *Hyperphyscia adglutinata*, on a Sycamore tree. We tried to make faster progress but our efforts were short-lived, as we were drawn to look at a splendid veteran Ash tree. The tree was hollow and clearly very old but there were surprisingly few lichens to be seen; I only added *Amandinea punctata* to my lichen list.

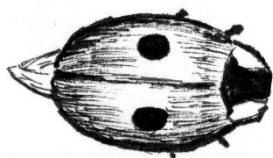
We stopped for lunch overlooking the lake and were quickly aware of what can only be described as a plague of Harlequin Ladybirds as they settled on our faces, on our clothes and on our lunch boxes.

We continued on our way, then paused to examine veteran oak trees growing in a more protected area at the bottom of the slope and close to the River Mimram. I knew that these trees had the potential for an interesting community of lichens, as *Cresponea premnea* had been recorded close by during an earlier visit. One Oak tree had a particularly large area of beetle holes and, after finding one of the culprits, Trevor was pleased to record a large colony of Death-watch Beetle *Xestobium rufovillosum*. From the same oak I recorded two lichens: *Diploicia canescens* and *Lecanora expallens*. William pointed out some relatively large lichen fruiting bodies on another tree and I initially thought he had found *Cliostomum griffithii* but soon realized that I was wrong and later was able to confirm another colony of

Cresponea premnea. From this tree I also recorded *Shismatomma decolorans* and a third species proved to be *Arthonia pruinata*, which is a very good record for our region.

An Italian Alder tree also proved to be of some interest. I found another lichenicolous fungus: *Unguiculariopsis thallophila*, growing on *Lecanora chlarotera*, and I was very curious about another lichen with a particularly exuberant thallus. I found that it was covered with reproductive structures known as pycnidia but I needed help with identification so later asked Mark Powell, who came to the conclusion that it was a pycnidiate form of *Lecanora chlarotera* and has only rarely been recorded in the past.

Some members of the group rested on a bench while others had a quick look for lichens on the concrete surround of a drain cover over a particularly smelly sewer. A few more lichens were added to the list: *Lecidella stigmatea*, *Lecanora dispersa*, *Lecanora muralis* and *Candelariella aurella*.



Before we all set off back towards the car park we were pleased to see a Two-spot Ladybird that had landed on Alla Mashanova's ear. On our walk back through the park along the top edge of the slope I recorded *Catillaria nigroclavata* and *Lecanora symmicta* on Oak twigs, as well as

Lecania cyrtella on Elder. We stopped to examine a skull that was in very good condition; Trevor identified it as a Fox skull and, as the teeth showed very little wear, we concluded that it was a young animal.

Approaching the car park, we stopped to examine Dark Mullein *Verbascum nigrum*, which was still in flower, and before ending the day we went to look at other Mullein plants that had been spotted growing on the verge of Thieves Lane. There was some discussion about whether these were *Verbascum pulverulentum* or *V. phlomoides* and I am still unclear about the conclusion [these are Orange Mullein *V. phlomoides* – been there years T.J.]. However, what I am sure of is that we all enjoyed the day exploring Panshanger Park and in time the lichen records produced will be available on the NBN Atlas (<https://nbnatlas.org/>) for lichenologists in the future.

Paula Shipway

BRICKET WOOD

Saturday 12th November

7 Members



When Paula Shipway rang me one Sunday afternoon, on Trevor James' suggestion, to ask me if I could lead a walk I was a bit taken aback. I thought it was too much of a responsibility to take a group of naturalists into the woods and start putting names to all the fungi we found. I thought I would rather let somebody else find the way and do the talking and I would just follow behind. Nevertheless, I

agreed, as I am very grateful to Hertfordshire branch of BNA for organising meetings in the first place and to all the leaders of previous meetings who had put in their time and had shared their knowledge.

As the meeting was getting closer I was getting more nervous. I thought: how can I take some BNA members to a site that they probably know better than me? What if I can't find my way around? Or what if we find lots of fungi that I don't know? I printed an OS map, managed to skip work one morning a few days before the meeting and went to the site to take a look. I saw there was a circular walk through most of the wood that was well sign-posted and decided to follow most of it. I walked fast, noting the fungi I saw, and more or less planned the route, allowing for last minute changes. I felt more confident and went back to work in the afternoon.

The meeting went as well as I could hope for. The weather wasn't great, but it didn't rain as much as I thought it would. There were lots of leaves on the ground and few large fruiting bodies. We had time to look properly, smell and try to remember the features of what we found.

We started at School Lane and headed north to north-east. Soon, Paula found a small oak branch on the ground with the fruiting bodies of the Green Elf-cup *Chlorociboria aeruginascens*. Most of us have seen the typical blue-green stained wood but to find the fruiting bodies in prime condition is less common. The stained wood is still in use today in decorative woodworking and it's called green oak.

We had a chance to test our sense of smell with the fruit bodies of several fungal species. The False Death-cap *Amanita citrina* smells of raw potatoes, the Angel's Bonnet *Mycena arcangeliana* has a chlorine or bleach smell that reminds me of the smell on my skin when I come out of my local swimming pool. The Oak-bug Milk-cap *Lactarius quietus* apparently smells of Oak-bugs. I can't really say as I have never seen (or smelled) one - if I ever find one I'll check if it smells of Oak-bug Milk-cap. The Common Earth-ball *Scleroderma citrinum* has an unpleasant smell of rubber. The Sulphur Knight *Tricholoma sulphureum* has got a bad smell too, like gas, but is a colourful yellow. On the cracks of the bark of a Hornbeam, William found what looked like the fruiting bodies of a Myxomycete. On closer inspection they were not, but I couldn't quite place them. William noticed the Fenugreek smell and remembered having seen them before and named the species. It was the Fenugreek Stalk-ball *Phleogena faginea*, not a Myxomycete, not an Ascomycete, but a very strange looking Basidiomycete!

We found Bitter Oysterling *Panellus stipticus* on some sawn-off logs in a clearing in the woods and we stopped for a quick lunch nearby. The species is named after its styptic properties and apparently can be used to stop the flow of blood.

When we reached the railway line we crossed under the bridge and followed the path alongside it, heading south-west. This area was fairly devoid of species and we moved faster. We found few species in the afternoon but the best one was a Veiled Oyster *Pleurotus dryinus* on dead Elder wood at the end of the walk and in full view of the parked cars.

We recorded 36 species, plus a scaly-cap *Pholiota sp.* that we couldn't fully identify.

| ASCOMYCOTA | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Ascocoryne sarcoides</i> | Purple Jelly-disc | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Chlorociboria aeruginascens</i> | Green Elf-cup | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Melanogramma campylosporum</i> | | dead Hornbeam bark |
| <i>Trochila ilicina</i> | Holly Speckle | dead Holly leaves |
| <i>Xylaria hypoxylon</i> | Candle-snuff Fungus | deciduous dead wood |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| BASIDIOMYCOTA | | in lines following bark cracks (Hornbeam) |
| <i>Phleogena faginea</i> | Fenugreek Stalk-ball | |
| <i>Amanita citrina</i> | False Death-cap | |
| <i>Armillaria mellea</i> | Honey Fungus | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Bjerkandera adusta</i> | Smoky Bracket | dead Beech wood |
| <i>Calocera cornea</i> | Small Stag's-horn | decorticated deciduous wood |
| <i>Clitocybe nebularis</i> | Clouded Agaric | |
| <i>Clitocybe phyllophila</i> | Frosty Funnel | |
| <i>Crepidotus mollis</i> | Peeling Oysterling | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Daedalopsis confragosa</i> | Blushing Bracket | dead Birch wood |
| <i>Gymnopilus penetrans</i> | Common Rust-gill | similar to <i>Galerina marginata</i> |
| <i>Hypholoma fasciculare</i> | Sulphur Tuft | on Birch |
| <i>Lactarius quietus</i> | Oak-bug Milk-cap | oily smell |
| <i>Lycoperdon perlatum</i> | Common Puffball | |
| <i>Lycoperdon piridiforme</i> | Stump Puffball | rotten deciduous wood |
| <i>Mycena arcangeliana</i> | Angel's Bonnet | |
| <i>Mycena galericulata</i> | Common Bonnet | dead Oak wood |
| <i>Panellus stipticus</i> | Bitter Oysterling | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Phlebia radiata</i> | Wrinkled Crust | beech dead wood |
| <i>Phlebia tremellosa</i> | Jelly Rot | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Pholiota cf. adiposa</i> | a scaly-cap | |
| <i>Piptoporus betulinus</i> | Birch Polypore | dead Birch wood |
| <i>Pleurotus dryinus</i> | Veiled Oyster | dead Elder wood |
| <i>Pluteus cervinus</i> | Deer Shield | rotten deciduous wood |
| <i>Rhodocollybia butyracea</i> | Butter-cap | |
| <i>Russula atropurpurea</i> | Purple Brittle-gill | |
| <i>Russula betularum</i> | Birch brittle-gill | under Birch |
| <i>Russula ochroleuca</i> | Ochre brittle-gill | |
| <i>Schiz opora paradoxa</i> | Split Pore-crust | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Scleroderma citrinum</i> | Common Earth-ball | |
| <i>Stereum hirsutum</i> | Hairy Curtain-crust | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Tricholoma sulphureum</i> | Sulphur Knight | |
| <i>Xerocomellus pruinatus</i> | Matt Bolete | |

OUGHTONHEAD COMMON

Saturday 26th November

8 members

Even before we moved away from the cars, Simon Knott and William Bishop had identified 12 birds and we all had clear views of a Mistle Thrush in a nearby conifer. On our reconnoitre before today's outing we had seen five brown Trout in the river from the bridge at Westmill, but sadly none were visible today. From the Mill Stream we took the path west, passing the overflow known locally as the Hitchin Waterfall and noted that a lot of work had been done recently to clear the undergrowth from around the water courses.

On the north side, across the river in Oughtonhead Nature Reserve (not open to the public) is an area of wet woodland dominated by Alder and Birch, with a number of standing dead trees. In one of these we had a good view of a Great Spotted Woodpecker and some of the group had a fleeting view of a Kingfisher. A little further on, several Silver Birch trees had a number of clumps of *Taphrini betulae*, a fungal infection causing 'witches broom' growths. On the south side of the Common we spotted a mixed flock of Siskins and Goldfinches feeding on the Alder seeds. We came across a viewing platform next to the river, entering under a carved wooden arch as memorial to Phil Lumley, who had been an active supporter of Oughtonhead and its volunteer warden for several years.

Walking along the river path we noticed what good condition the river was in, being clear, flowing well and as high as anyone remembered. We continued south and a unanimous decision was taken to follow the path up to the café for warming drinks and home-made cake - a diversion, which everyone agreed we should repeat occasionally!

Returning to the edge of the arable field we noted a flock of Fieldfares, some Redwings and a single Starling. In the sky looking towards Foxholes were five Skylarks – larking about, as they do. A Buzzard we had spotted earlier landed in a neighbouring tree, scattering a group of Wood Pigeons. We decided this was a good dry spot for lunch, as the fog began to lift a little.

On the edge of the Common, in the narrow woodland strip, was a melanistic

Grey Squirrel, along with a grey one. We then entered the grazing common, with its three English Longhorn cattle in residence. The Common has very many ancient ant-hills, a familiar feature of old, unploughed grassland. There was no shortage of winter food for the birds: Guelder Rose, Buckthorn and Hawthorn berries were in abundance and fruiting Hemp Agrimony further increasing the availability of seed. We watched a display from a Kestrel alternately flying around and landing in search of food.

Making our way back towards the mill we had a lengthy view of a female Kingfisher perching above the river. We then took the SW path along the Icknield Way with its broad path bordered by high mixed mature hedgerows and views towards Deacon and Pegsdon Hills. Another treat for all of us was a flock of about 120 Lapwings taking off from the stubble and a female Kestrel hunting from a boundary post.

On our return it was pleasing to realise we had seen all five British thrushes, and in all 45 bird species, including a flock of Linnets that appeared as a finale just as we reached our cars.

Ruth Graham and Jean Williamson

Bird list (with thanks to William Bishop) -

Buzzard, Long-tailed Tit, Wood Pigeon, Blackbird, Robin, Carrion Crow, Blue Tit, Black-headed Gull, Wren, Skylark, Magpie, Dunnock, Goldcrest, Redwing, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Pheasant, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Jackdaw, Collared Dove, Starling, Moorhen, Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Siskin, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting, Jay, Mallard, Grey Wagtail, Great Tit, Pied Wagtail, Feral Pigeon, Little Egret, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Kestrel, Fieldfare, Yellowhammer, Meadow Pipit, Sparrowhawk, Green Woodpecker, Lapwing, Stock Dove.



CHORLEYWOOD COMMON

Saturday 10th December

6 members

On a typical dull December's day, we made our way from the northern car park off the busy A404 and took to the relative peace of Chorleywood

Common. We followed the circular route around the Common in an anti-clockwise direction. The trees around the car park had a few lichens on them but were not particularly rich, but as we followed the eastern fringe of the secondary woodland, the spreading branches of the outer oaks proved more productive, although with fairly typical species for such a habitat, such as *Flavoparmelia soledians* and *Evernia prunastri*.

We made a detour out in to the open grassland to examine a Heather patch. Not only is it good to see Heather in Hertfordshire, it was one of the more interesting habitats for lichens, in particular members of the genus *Cladonia*. Among these were a couple of the pixie-cups *Cladonia fimbriata* and *Cladonia pyxidata*, the latter 'Pebble Pixie-cup' being like a goblet fully of jade pebbles. The third member of the genus *Cladonia rangiformis* is a reindeer-moss type.



There were some fine ant-hills nearby and Simon said how important the Yellow Meadow-ant is to grassland ecology. It is a keystone species, many other organisms depending upon it, including certain root aphids, which are specific to the ant-hills.

We reached the south side of the Common and the view opened up over the streets of Chorleywood in the valley, which resonated to the singing of a Song Thrush, a joyous sound in the depths of December.

A coppiced Ash tree yielded some different lichens from the Oaks, such as *Cliostomum griffithii*, which, under the hand-lens, looks a bit like coal dust embedded in polystyrene, and the relative newcomers to this region *Lecanora barkmaniana* and *Flavoparmelia soledians*. Then, following the long sweep of grassland on the south side of the woodland, lunch was taken on the edge of the woodland, in front of a dwarfed Pedunculate Oak somewhat reminiscent of the 'Climbing Tree' at Nomansland Common, having low spreading branches, which was excellent for examining lichens. It had a good few, although nothing different from other trees on the Common.

After amazing a local resident with our fascination with the lichen colonisation on some metal signs, we continued the circuit back to the car park. It had been a good visit, although the weather was nothing special. The company was what I appreciated as much as the interest of the others in our party and to benefit from their knowledge of natural history.

Lichens:

Amandinea punctata – on Oak twigs and bench

Arthonia radiata – on Oak twigs

Buellia griseovirens –on bench

Caloplaca cerinella– on Elder twigs

Candelariella vitellina – on bench

Cladonia fimbriata– on burnt Heather stem and mossy Oak trunk

Cladonia pyxidata – on ground among mosses in Heather patch

Cladonia rangiformis – on ground among mosses in Heather patch

Cliostomum griffithii - on coppiced Ash

Evernia prunastri– on Oak

Flavoparmelia caperata –on trunks and main branches of some Oaks

Flavoparmelia soredians -on coppiced Ash

Hypogymnia physodes –on Heather stem and metal sign

Hypotrachyna afrorevoluta –on metal sign

Hypotrachyna revoluta –on Oak and metal sign

Lecanora barkmaniana –on coppiced Ash

Lecanora chlorotera –on twigs and branches of Oak

Lecanora expallens –on dry side of Oak trunks

Lecanora hagenii –on Elder twig

Lecidella elaeochroma – on twigs

Lepraria incana– on dry side of Oak trunks and rough bark of Birch

Melanelixia subaurifera– on Oak branches and metal sign

Melanohalea elegantula – on small Oak on south side of Common

Parmelia sulcata –one of the commonest foliose species on the Oak trees

Parmotrema perlatum –on Oak and Ash (often towards base of trunk)

Phaeophyscia orbicularis – on Elder

Phlyctis argena– on coppiced Ash

Physcia adscendens –on twigs of basic barked trees such as Elder

Physcia tenella – on twigs and small branches of Oak

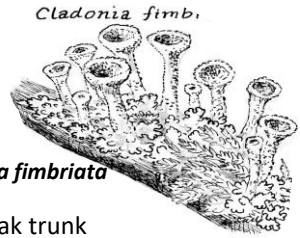
Punctelia jeckeri –on Oak

Punctelia subrudecta – on Oak

Ramalina farinacea –on Oak branch

Ramalina fastigiata– on twig

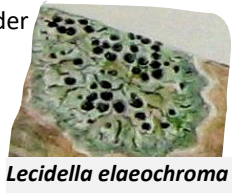
Xanthoria parietina –on nutrient enriched twigs, particularly those of Elder



Cladonia fimbriata



Cladonia pyxidata



Lecidella elaeochroma

Birds: Kestrel, Wood Pigeon, Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw (in Chorleywood), Carrion Crow, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Song Thrush (singing individual in Chorleywood), Redwing, Pied Wagtail, Robin

Andrew Harris

BOXING DAY WALK NORTHCHURCH COMMON, BERKHAMSTED

Monday 26th December 2016

5 members

Our group met in the car park off New Road, ready for the traditional Boxing Day meeting. Whilst waiting for any late-comers, we watched a determined Rook that was intent on harassing a Buzzard, and I spent a few minutes with Alla, who was curious about a lichen that she had spotted on a twig collected from a previous BNA Meeting.

In the past this meeting has been an excuse for some exercise after Christmas excesses. However, the group seemed very happy to potter in the scrubby area next to the car park. We disturbed a group of Fallow Deer that moved slowly away and, after comments on the quantity of lichen covering Elder and Hawthorn bushes, I noted a few down in my notebook. From the Hawthorn there were: *Ramalina farinacea*, *Xanthoria parietina*, *Punctelia subrudecta*, *Flavoparmelia caperata*, *Parmelia sulcata*, *Physcia tenella*, *Parmotrema perlatum*, *Arthonia radiata*, *Punctelia jeckeri*, and *Hypogymnia physodes*. From the Elder I noted: *Evernia prunastri*, *Candelariella reflexa*, *Phaeophyscia orbicularis* and two lichenicolous fungi; the recently re-named *Heterocephalacria physciacearum* growing on *Physcia tenella* and *Illosporopsis christiansenii* on a *Physcia* species.

Jum Demidecki pointed out the edible fungus Jews-ear *Auricularia auricula-judae* growing on Elder, and then we all moved off to look at a Badger sett discovered by Mike Demidecki. There was a worn path leading to one entrance, but we couldn't see evidence of what was using the sett. Andrew Harris and I took a close look at lichen covering a large area on the trunk of an Ash tree and agreed that it was *Cliostomum griffithii*. Others in the group watched a Bank Vole and I photographed one of four Orange Ladybirds that were hibernating in bark crevices, which I have gathered since is a first record for the tetrad.

We made slight progress along the planned route, walking west along the southern edge of the Common. We crossed over the road and followed the path through a quiet area of the Common where deer hide away from the

popular dog walking area. There are large areas of overgrown scrub and old Elder trees, where we saw Muntjac slots and several more groups of Fallow Deer.

Our morning was disappearing too quickly and I suggested a shorter route back to the cars. However, after mentioning my earlier discovery of a veteran Cherry tree further along the original planned route, the decision was made that we should walk quickly as far as the Cherry tree before turning. On our route we noted Hazel *Corylus avellana* in flower and noisy Jays were making their presence amongst the trees known. I also noted down Blackbird and Wood Pigeon.

The veteran Cherry had reproduced through suckering over the years and formed a Cherry tree glade of considerable size. All members were impressed and photos were taken. Before following a route back to the cars, a very large herd of Fallow Deer crossed the path just ahead of us. We estimated 30 or 40 individuals. After setting off, we dropped down into a small valley and up the other side, noting that Gorse *Ulex europaeus* was in flower. Mike showed us a rutting stand under a willow tree, where the ground had been disturbed and a small branch broken. Areas of bark were hanging in ribbons where the buck had been rubbing its antlers.

With thoughts of lunch, we crossed through the more popular area of the Common and soon reached the car park, and agreed that it had been a relaxed and enjoyable morning.

Thanks to Andrew for adding Goldcrest, Dunnock and Goldfinch to the meagre bird list.

Paula Shipway



2017

MAPLE LODGE NATURE RESERVE, RICKMANSWORTH

Saturday 7th January 2017

Maple Lodge reserve is a 40-acre mixed habitat based around disused gravel workings. There are two fairly shallow lakes, a wooded area with Oak, Ash and Alder, a wild-flower meadow and a planted hedgerow containing native berry producing shrubs like Hawthorn, Guelder-rose, Dogwood and Wayfaring-tree. Even on a cold January day we appreciated much of this variety as we wandered around.

We looked out of the hides on a scene which was quintessentially wintery, the willows and rushes with an icy stillness and stiffness. The lakes were mostly frozen over after several severe frosts. This limited the duck numbers, as they had probably re-located to frost-free areas of deeper water in the Colne valley. We did see several Teal on the lake and on entering the reserve we had seen a group of Siskins on the Alders near the path.

We made our way around the nature reserve, which is something of a microcosm of the lower Colne valley, with a variety of wetland and woodland habitats. After pausing to look through a number of the hides, the party reached the far side of the reserve, which is more open, with a small wild-flower meadow and, in contrast to the younger woodland and scrub, here was a fine old Oak tree. One of its lower boughs had a good covering of lichens, among them *Melanohalea elegantula*, one of a number of lichens that have returned to Hertfordshire in the last couple of decades and are now becoming widespread.

Beyond the hedgerow that marks the boundary of the nature reserve are the fields of Lynsters Farm, and there was much to see here. Besides the expected flocks of Fieldfare were three Egyptian Geese and a flock of 20 Stock Doves.

Most of the party left after mid-day, although William and Simon continued on to Stockers Lake.

Jill Saunders (with additions from Andrew Harris)

Birds seen at Maple Lodge NR(with thanks to William Bishop for the list):Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Egyptian Goose, Mute Swan, Mallard, Gadwall, Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Buzzard, Red Kite, Sparrowhawk, Coot, Moorhen, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Feral Pigeon, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Ring-necked Parakeet, Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare, Redwing, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Treecreeper, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Chaffinch, Siskin, Goldfinch.

Additional birds from Stockers Lake (Simon Knott and William Bishop): Little Egret, Red-crested Pochard, Pochard, Goldeneye, Smew, Lapwing, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Kingfisher.

HERTS BRANCH AGM

Saturday 21st January 2017

17 members & 1 visitor

This year's AGM was marked by the very unusual absence of Trevor James, Chairman, who was recovering from his chemo- and radiotherapy before having to undergo surgery in February. Chris chaired the meeting and read Trevor's report on his behalf. It reminded members that they could count themselves as being a high percentage of those who make a real contribution to the county's expertise. This was something we could be proud of. Herts Branch is very good at doing what it is doing, namely being enthusiastic about seeing wildlife in its environment and learning about it as we go along together.

In her own report as Secretary, Chris thanked all the committee for keeping the Branch going, especially Paula Shipway for her programme, Andrew Harris for the Bulletins and Merle Gwyn for her hospitality at committee meetings. The Branch had held 22 meetings in 2016, including the special one to celebrate our 70th anniversary. Chris reminded members that the branch would not function without the help of all those who lead the meetings and thanked everyone who does this, especially those who had led their first meeting during the year.

We heard from David Shipway that the Branch's funds were in generally good heart, although there had been a small working deficit at the end of the financial year, due mainly to the special expenditure on the anniversary party, which had included a donation to the Bayfordbury Field Station.

It was with relief that Chris was able to tell the meeting that Jean Williamson had agreed to stand for election as Chairman to replace Trevor. She was elected without further ado on the understanding that her appointment was only 'temporary'! David Shipway remained as Treasurer and (in his absence) Trevor was elected as Committee Member.

As is traditional at the AGM, members recorded their special wildlife sightings of the year, before the proceedings halted temporarily for tea and cakes. The afternoon was brought to a satisfactory and enjoyable conclusion after this sumptuous meal with several members presenting their Powerpoint 'slideshows'.

Chris James

'PAST HERTFORDSHIRE NATURALISTS'

A talk by Revd. Tom Gladwin

Saturday 4th February

This was a fascinating talk given by Tom, illustrated by 60 slides. I am certain that few of those present appreciated the tremendous wealth of historic natural history personalities having Hertfordshire connections but Tom's huge piece of research, along with historic plates, maps, photos and specimens relayed to us via the wonderful modern 'medium' of 'Powerpoint' certainly filled in our educational gaps.

Tom focused his attention on late Georgian and Victorian naturalists and, one by one, the famous names were brought before us: from Edward Sabine (buried at Tewin), through Darwin, Yarrell (buried at Bayford) to Wallace (educated at Hertford Grammar School) but including others such as J.F. Stephens, Bewick and Swainson.

Tom asked important questions: without the support and assistance of William Yarrell, would Darwin have completed his famous book, the 'Origin of Species'?; should Wallace have been recognised as the founder of The Theory of Evolution, or at least treated equally with Darwin? And finally, Tom reminded us of Oliver Pike, a well-known Hertfordshire ornithologist and photographer whose photographs proved beyond doubt the first breeding in Britain of the Little Ringed Plover – at Tring Reservoirs in 1938.

Thank you, Tom, for a marvellous talk.

Chris James

NOMANSLAND COMMON

Saturday 18th February

9 members

Several months ago, when asked to lead a meeting here, I had intended to spend most of the time in Heartwood Forest. In the previous two winters, Heartwood had been attracting interesting birds, like Short-eared Owls, Stonechats, Redpolls and Great Grey Shrike, but sadly this year was not getting the birds. This may be due to several factors – the mildness of this winter causing fewer birds, the trees maturing and increased dog walker pressure. So, instead I opted to go east of the Common. We crossed the road and headed over the short turf back towards the cross-roads. We noted a rather fine oak, covered in many of the commoner tree lichens, but beautifully encrusted. Before everyone arrived, these lichens were being inspected by a Goldcrest, every bit as diligently as our lichenologists, but probably with an arachnologist's eye. I asked Paula Shipway what the pink bits were and was informed: *Marchandiobasidium aurantiacum*, a fungus parasitic on lichens. In the turf, we saw several plants of Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor*, and, further along, the lichen *Cladonia rangiformis*, identified by Andrew Harris.

We passed Nomansland Farm, heading towards Hammonds Farm, seeing lots of footprints of Muntjac and Fallow Deer (checked by Mike Demidecki) but never did see the animals themselves. There were nice colonies of *Cladonia pyxidata* at Hammonds Farm and Mike found several owl pellets, the latter taken for examination later. Hammond's Lane had reasonable quantities of

Shining Crane's-bill *Geranium lucidum* on its banks. We now headed to Symondshyde Great Wood, where Andrew found a rather good lichen: *Pertusaria leioplaca*, on a young ash tree. Simon managed to spot a lone *Silpha atrata*, a snail eating beetle, under a log. We emerged from the wood at Symondshyde Farm and made our way to Titnol's Wood, which proved to be extremely wet under foot. Although somewhat challenging, we crossed the wood and, after admiring a perched Buzzard, had our lunch. In Titnol's Wood we saw a rather attractive patch of the liverwort *Frullania dilatata*. Claudi Soler showed us a most attractive small fungus: *Nectria pisphaeria*, like little ruby dots, growing on *Diatrype stigma*. The party now made its way past West Grove towards Cromer Hyde. Here we saw Snowdrops in flower, lots of truly splendid examples of the Trumpet Lichen *Ramalina fastigiata*, a huge mixed corvid flock and a large flock of Stock Doves in the fields. Then we took a path in the field above Lamb's Grove. At this point Simon found the "bird of the day": a Peregrine circling above Bocket Park.

We dropped down into the green lane that runs from Coleman Green down to Bocket Park. This is one of my favourite lanes, which in summer is glorious; on this occasion, it was slightly wet and muddy. Rather sadly, the land owner has filled one point with hardcore and earth to complete a farm track that crosses the ancient lane. At the top of the lane we paused to look at Bunyan's Chimney. Claudi produced an interesting crust fungus he had found and showed us how it reacted to being cut; aptly named Bleeding Broadleaf Crust *Stereum rugosum*, it bled. Heading down the road back towards Nomansland Farm, there was a log covered in the fungus Hairy Curtain Crust *Stereum hirsutum*, which stood out in the improving light of what till now had been a gloomy day, a rather nice orange-yellow colour.

We then retraced our path back to Nomansland just before 4.00 p.m. and made our farewells. My Thanks to all who came and apologies for the excessive mud in Titnol's Wood.

Birds: Cormorant, Buzzard, Red Kite, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine, Pheasant, Red-legged Partridge, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare, Redwing, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Wren, Goldcrest, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Starling, Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, House Sparrow.

William Bishop

Fungi (Claudi Soler):

| ASCOMYCOTA | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <i>Annulohypoxylon multiforme</i> | Birch Woodward | Birch dead bark |
| <i>Daldinia concentrica</i> | King Alfred's cakes | dead Ash wood |
| <i>Diatrype stigma</i> | Common Tar-crust | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Hypoxylon fuscum</i> | Hazel Woodward | dead Hazel wood |
| <i>Hypoxylon petriniae</i> | | Dead Ash bark |
| <i>Nectria episphaeria</i> | | dead <i>Diatrype stigma</i> fruiting body |
| <i>Rhopographus filicinus</i> | Bracken Map | dead Bracken stalk |
| <i>Rhystisma acerinum</i> | Tar-spot | dead Sycamore leaves |
| <i>Xylaria hypoxylon</i> | Candle-snuff Fungus | rotten deciduous dead wood |
| BASIDIOMYCOTA | | |
| <i>Auricularia auricula-judae</i> | Jelly-ear | Dead Elder and Ash wood |
| <i>Bjerkandera adusta</i> | Smoky Bracket | <i>Salix</i> sp. dead wood |
| <i>Chondrostereum purpureum</i> | Silverleaf Fungus | fallen pine branch bark |
| <i>Daedaleopsis confragosa</i> | Blushing Bracket | <i>Salix</i> sp. dead wood |
| <i>Exidia glandulosa</i> | Witches' Butter | <i>Salix</i> sp. dead wood |
| <i>Hypodontia sambuci</i> | Elder Whitewash | dead Elder wood |
| <i>Lycoperdon pyriforme</i> | Stump Puffball | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Marchandiobasidium aurantiacum</i> | | Id by Paula Shipway. Parasitic on lichens. On Ash bark |
| <i>Panaeolus olivaceus</i> | Mottle-gill | grass under oak |
| <i>Phlebia radiata</i> | Wrinkled Crust | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Piptoporus betulinus</i> | Birch Polypore | dead Birch wood |
| <i>Psilocybe montana</i> | Mountain Brownie | mossy grass |
| <i>Schizopora paradoxa</i> | Split Pore-crust | <i>Salix</i> sp. dead wood |
| <i>Stereum hirsutum</i> | Hairy Curtain-crust | deciduous dead wood |
| <i>Stereum rugosum</i> | Bleeding Broadleaf-crust | dead Hazel wood. |
| <i>Trametes versicolor</i> | Turkey-tails | deciduous dead wood |

TYTTENHANGER

Saturday 4th March

7 members

This was due to be Trevor James' meeting but, as he was unavailable, I was asked to lead, so more an episode of "Never mind the quality, feel the width" for the attendees. We did our best on the day, wished Trevor well and hoped to see him leading us again soon.

Luck was with us on the weather front, as the day had been forecast to be poor a week before, but it was warmish with sunshine; a pleasant early spring day.

I had turned up at 08:30 to re-check the main pit. Green Woodpeckers were everywhere and the Caspian Gull was on the sandy pit edge. By 10:00 six others joined had me. Andrew Harris spotted a Treecreeper in the churchyard and Simon Knott heard a Goldcrest here too. We set off from the church to the main pit. Near the waterworks was a tree with lots of woodpecker holes that had broken and in the open top an old Hornet's nest could be seen, the combs visible.

The views from the west side of the pit at this time of day are poor because the sun is to the east, but a scan through the assembled birds failed to find the Caspian Gull, which had obviously left. Two Oystercatchers were present and, on the far side of the pit, was a distant Green Sandpiper. A moderate sized Lapwing flock was present. We set off to do a clockwise circuit of the main pit, stopping by the reedbed to listen to the rather thin and reedy little song of Reed Buntings. Rounding the reedbed, the light was better looking west into the birds: lots of Black-headed Gulls, Common Gulls and Lapwings, with a few other species intermingled. In a group of Cormorants, the Oystercatchers were easier to see too. Moving on, we made our way to the feeding station to see the Tree Sparrows. A pristine male Reed Bunting showed well, a dapper little chap in summer plumage. Simon found a single Tree Sparrow but it departed almost instantly and, despite a wait, no others appeared. A Brown Rat was feeding under the feeder and Simon caught a queen Buff-tailed Bumblebee on the bank. We passed over the causeway, spotting a Little Grebe and Little Egrets, and getting good views of Grey Heron and Cormorants. Continuing on, we finished the loop of the main pit

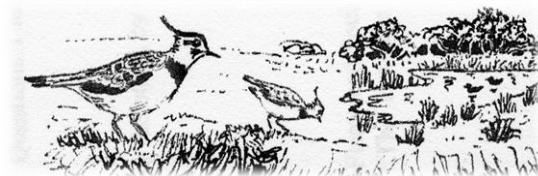
and made our way to the fishermen's car park. On the way, we passed a couple of *Physcia aipolia* on a fence rail, my favourite lichen, and I believe Andrew's too.

We stopped by the café to have lunch. Simon heard a Kingfisher twice but we failed to find it. After lunch, only three of us set off to walk the fishing pits. We went south-west to Willows Farm, spotting a hybrid goose that appeared to be a Barnacle Goose cross. At one point we passed a patch of Coltsfoot flowers, beautiful bright yellow suns shining in the dead winter vegetation around them. Pigs and goats were admired but not petted on passing through Willows Farm. Crossing the fields in front of Tyttenhanger House we scanned trees, seeking the Little Owl without success, before going through Garden Wood. The next short piece saw us retrace our steps back to the Tree Sparrow feeder, where we had some rather good views of a couple of these pretty but rapidly declining little birds. Crossing the fields towards Colney Heath, two Red Kites displayed their mastery of the air in front of us. On the heath a Great Spotted Woodpecker perched in a tree and a Fieldfare in a hawthorn. Then back to the parked cars by the church.

My Thanks to my fellow walkers for your help on the day.

Birds: Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Mallard, Gadwall, Shoveler, Teal, Tufted Duck, Buzzard, Red Kite, Green Sandpiper, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Coot, Moorhen, Caspian Gull (WB), Lesser Black-backed Gull, Common Gull, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kingfisher, Skylark, Fieldfare, Redwing, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Goldcrest, Wren, Treecreeper, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Starling, Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Reed Bunting, Tree Sparrow.

Mammals: Rabbit, Grey Squirrel, Brown Rat, Mole (hills), Muntjac (slots).



William Bishop

BARKWAY

Saturday 18th March

11 members

Starting off cloudy, offering a brief spell of sunshine at lunchtime, going back to cloudy and windy and finishing with some drizzle, our day in north-east Hertfordshire seemed to be a typical March day. Our route took us in a westerly direction from the High Street in the attractive village of Barkway along a green lane towards Reed, passing along the north side of Rokey Wood and Bush Wood to Reed Church and then returning along parallel paths along the south side of Rokey and Bush Woods and back into Barkway via the churchyard. William Bishop and Simon Knott recorded birds, Julie Wise recorded mammals and amphibians for the HNHS survey, Paula Shipway listed lichens and Claudi Soler concentrated on fungi.

The first mammal record of the day was obtained from north of the green lane, where we saw two Hares behaving very sedately, and then a small herd of Fallow Deer grazing happily with a flock of sheep in a field north of Rokey Wood. We dawdled along the edge of the wood, looking for a way in to explore the edge of it, but wanting to 'lose' a man and his dog first (in case he was a gamekeeper!). We found Oak, Ash and Hazel and evidence of lots of Bluebells, along with a sprinkling of Primroses and Dog's Mercury. Paula found a rare lichen on an ash tree and most of us spotted the Badger latrines. Claudi started on his list!

North of Bush Wood, we disturbed a mixed flock of Chaffinches and Yellowhammers and watched them fly away down a wide strip planted up for game birds. We also recorded a Marsh Tit in the hedge nearby – a good record because these are apparently in decline in many parts of the county.

The map indicated some Mediaeval fish ponds just east of Reed but these were completely overgrown with scrub, which was a shame. Moving on, we walked through a large meadow, which seemed to be in quite good condition, with Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, Ladies' Smock *Cardamine pratense* and Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris* in the mix. It needed something to graze it but, no sooner had we decided that its tussocky character would make it good for voles than we started finding large owl pellets in the grass below telephone lines and especially below the pole in

the middle of the field! Simon had heard that Barn Owls were nesting in the churchyard, so that explained everything. Indeed, once in the churchyard, we observed no fewer than three owl nesting boxes. Well done, the good parishioners of Reed! We also admired a beautifully laid hedge along the southern boundary of the churchyard. A Chiffchaff called from nearby.

We enjoyed our picnics in a quiet spot by a pond at Gannock Grove. The brief moment of sunshine brought out a Peacock butterfly and Julie added Frog (spawn) to her list. Five Buzzards flew around overhead arguing with two Red Kites.

Turning back on our parallel traverse, we decided that the moat in Bush Wood was not especially interesting – being dry – and the flora was similar to that of Rokey Wood. The owner appeared to have started doing some woodland work because several Ash trees had been felled. A quick sortie into the southern edge of Rokey Wood yielded only Bugle *Ajuga reptans* as an additional plant for the wood. We followed the bridleway south-eastwards to its junction with a green lane, which we followed back into Barkway. Here on a bank by some farm buildings, Alla Mashanova spotted two clumps of an interesting fern which turned out to be the Hard Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum*, a record that Trevor was very pleased with! We allowed Paula to look for lichens in the churchyard whilst others spent some time looking down into the nearby pond, hoping that something good for Julie's list would show itself – but no show. Not long after that we returned to our cars and headed off home after another enjoyable day in the rural landscape of north-east Herts.

Alla's plants: Sweet Violet *Viola odorata*, Early Dog Violet *V. reichenbachiana*, Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, a Dandelion *Taraxacum* sp., Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*, Butterbur *Petasites hybridus*, Slender Speedwell *Veronica filiformis*, Groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*, Cherry Plum *Prunus cerasifera*, Red Dead-nettle *Lamium purpureum*, Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, Shepherd's Purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*, Common Whitlow-grass *Erophila verna*.



Claudi's fungi: In Rokey Wood were *Psathyrella* sp. (a brittlestem), a *Phellinus* sp. (a brown 'porecrust' on Backthorn), *Hypoxylon fuscum* (a woodwart on Hazel), *Hypoxylon petriniae* (a woodwart on Ash), *Inonotus hispidus* (Shaggy Bracket) on Ash and *Bjerkandera adusta* (Smoky Bracket) on Ash.

Fungi elsewhere: *Hypoxylon cercidiola* (a woodwart on Ash), *Diatrypella quercina* (Oak Blackhead), *Rhytisma acerinum* (Sycamore Tar Spot), *Hyphodontia sambuci* (Elder Whitewash).

Chris James



FROGMORE LAKES, PARK STREET

Saturday 1st April

6 members

Six of us met for this ramble on a glorious spring day. The plan was to identify willow trees, this site having been recommended by Trevor James. We met in the car park off Hyde Lane, by the River Ver. A Chiffchaff and a Blackcap were singing as we assembled. There was a lot to see, even near the car park: Butterbur was in flower by the river and next to this was a flowering female Purple Willow bush. A tall Crack Willow leaned over the river Ver. There was a Goat Willow in fruit by the car park, its old leaves on the ground defining the species. (Goat Willow generally flowers before the Grey Willow). It was thought that a nearby willow bush might have been *Salix x calodendron*. According to R.D. Meikle in *Willows and Poplars of Great Britain and Ireland* the likely parentage of this willow is apparently Goat Willow, Grey Willow and Osier - although we didn't find any of the latter on this ramble. It is often an introduction, however, apparently quite sterile and all known material is female. (Trevor later told me that someone else had submitted a record of this hybrid from Frogmore Lakes, but a cutting is required to confirm.)

After noting some escaped Daffodils in flower we crossed the River Ver and proceeded around the largest of the lakes which, like the others, is a former

gravel pit. Some fishermen were there even though it was the close season for course fish. There were Mute Swans, many Canada Geese and Mallard on this lake and two Great Crested Grebes were displaying, shaking their heads at one another. There was a lot of Grey Sallow in flower. We admired a beautiful Weeping Willow in full flower, drooping over the lake. (Trevor says in his *Flora of Hertfordshire* that here the Weeping Willow is apparently self-sown). The young reddish-bronze leaves of a Hybrid Black Poplar gave this tree's name away Alla photographed the male catkins of a Purple Willow whose buds were just opening .



Male Catkin on Purple Willow: Photo Alla Mashanova

Just north-west of the lake was a line of Italian Alder trees, planted to screen off a nearby mobile home park. We continued round the lake, White Willow trees being in evidence here, their leaves being hairy on both sides. There were also many Grey Willow trees along this side of the lake. We met a teenage boy who enquired what we were doing. He was a fisherman and showed us fish in the river which he said were Chub. A Bee-fly was seen. We now returned to the bridge where we had crossed over the river originally.

We had lunch on the felled stumps of woodland which, Patricia Baker informed us, was originally a Bryant & May poplar plantation.

After lunch, Merle Gwyn and Andrew Harris left us, and the rest of us walked north-west, passing first alongside the smaller lake to the west where there were many dead or dying willow trees, then along the old green lane (formerly a continuation of Hyde lane). We walked almost to the railway line and then turned south over the meadows, overlying former landfill on more gravel pits. The hedgerow along the green lane was ablaze with the white flowers of Blackthorn and towering above were the flowering trees of Norway Maple. We found a Grey Willow tree on the meadow, surrounded by a small growing copse of very young Grey Willow trees, no doubt self-seeded from the older tree. We noted many of the plants growing here (see list below) before returning to the green lane and from there back to our cars.

Birds (other than mentioned above): Tufted Duck, Moorhen, Coot, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Robin, Great Tit (singing), Blue Tit, Wren, Pied Wagtail, Magpie.

Butterflies: Orange-tip, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell.

Flora (other than mentioned above):

Around large lake: Himalayan Balsam, Water Mint, Water Figwort, Yellow Flag Iris, Japanese Knotweed, Spear Thistle, Cuckoo-flower, Self-heal, Wild Angelica, Yew, Coltsfoot, Brooklime, Ground-elder, Dandelion (sp.), Common Figwort, Water-starwort (sp.) (in river), Jointed Rush, Purple Loosestrife, Greater Pond-sedge.

Along green lane: Greater Stitchwort (in flower), Forget-me-not (sp.), Greater Celandine (in flower), Elm (sp.) (flowers seen on ground).

On meadows: Dog Rose, Teasel (in fruit), Hogweed, Meadow Vetchling, Hairy Bittercress (in flower), Burdock (sp.) (with seed heads).

Moss: Spear-headed Moss (in the meadows) - pictured right→

Mammal: Rabbit seen at TL14523 03014.



Michael Demidecki

THUNDERFIELD GROVE and WORMLEY WOOD

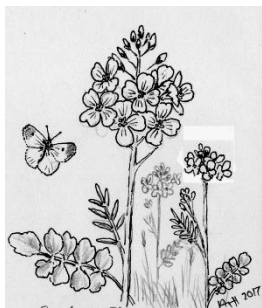
Saturday 15th April

6 members



Bencroft Wood: Photo Andrew Harris

A very pleasant dry Spring day encouraged six of us as we left the west car park at Bencroft Wood and followed informal paths through the wood to the south boundary. The woodland flora wasn't varied enough to detain us for very long but there was more of interest in the meadow, where a public footpath led us southwards and downhill towards Wormley West End. Here we spread out and found the following plants: Ladies' Smock *Cardamine pratensis*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Common Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*, Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, White and Red Clovers *Trifolium repens* & *T. pratense*, Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis*, Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, and Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*.



A quick dog-leg took us across the Wormleybury Brook, where we found a good clump of Ramsons *Allium ursinum* growing on the banks. What goes down must go up again and so we steadily ascended through the next meadow (where an archery ground had been established at a safe distance from the path). There was a brief halt to check the contents of a cattle trough, in case there were any interesting beetles, and we found quite a lot more Ladies' Smock (pictured) just before we crossed the old Back Lane with its boundary banks. At the small settlement of Beaumont we wondered at the grand houses (built with planning permission supposedly as farm cottages!) then turned off the lane into the edge of Thunderfield Grove Nature Reserve.

Almost immediately at the west end we found an open area beneath power lines, where the trees had been felled. Young scrub was developing along with good butterfly plants such as Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*, Foxgloves *Digitalis purpurea* and brambles *Rubus* spp. and we thought this would be a good patch later in the year. We then followed the rather dull east-west ride through the middle of the wood, finding a few clumps of Wood Avens *Geum urbanum*, more Heath Speedwell, Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* and Enchanter's Nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*. We felt it was a shame that more had not been done in this reserve to create better woodland habitats, for example widening of the main ride and some coppicing.

Encouraged by the strengthening sunshine, several small clouds of the iridescent green long-horn moths *Adela reaumurella* flew around the low branches of trees along the track. We decided it was time for lunch and found a picnic spot at the east end of the wood. After lunch, the sun had come out properly and it was a lovely warm spring day, so we hoped for a few more, early butterflies. Sure enough, in another small glade near the gate at the east end of the wood, we were rewarded with male and female Orange-tips and a Speckled Wood. And, best of all, we nearly tripped over a Slow-worm basking in the sunshine!

We emerged on to the intriguingly named Park Lane Paradise briefly before turning west along Beaumont Lane, again briefly, and finding the first of the northerly-oriented footpaths that would take us back to our cars. Our second

record of reptiles/amphibians for the day was made from the ditch along Beaumont Lane – some clumps of Frog tadpoles.

Just after re-crossing Back Lane at the corner of Biggs Grove, we found a fine old Oak pollard buried in a small woodland. Then we followed the next northward path, leading away from Wormley West End and gently climbing towards Emmanuel Pollards. In the hedgerow bordering the meadow there were two large (presumably) Wild Pear trees *Pyrus communis* – fine trees that would have looked a picture just a bit later in the spring.

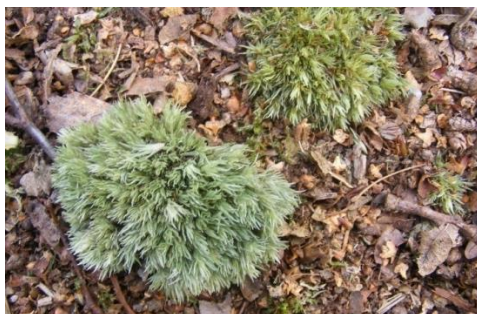
Our final leg was back through Bencroft Wood, where, in contrast to Thunderfield Grove, the central east-west ride had been well cut back. So there were more glades bathed in warm sunshine, some nice shrubby growth and more flowering woodland plants: Common Figwort *Scrophularia nodosa*, Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, Rosebay Willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium*, Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana*, more Yellow Pimpernel and Marsh Thistles. We also found a puffy white slime mould on a stump – *Reticularia lycoperdon*.

And so, we returned to our cars where we wished the sun had come out sooner!

Beetles in the water trough(identified by Trevor James):

Helophorus grandis, *Helophorus obscurus*, *Helophorus brevipalpis*. None of these are easy to identify so you can picture poor Trevor (enjoying himself really!) trying to sort them out through the microscope.

Chris James



Above: Hedgehog Moss *Leucobryum glaucum* a species of acidic woodlands found in Bencroft Wood during this meeting (photo Andrew Harris)

HARPENDEN COMMON

Saturday 29th April

A gentle meander across Harpenden Common allowed us to enjoy the various habitats present on this historically interesting site (an older chap that we bumped into told us that one of the common's previous uses was a race course). We generated an impressive plant list for the day, which Alla Mashanova will be contributing to the BSBI survey for the new plant atlas. Perhaps the highlights among the many species identified was a Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* that had, miraculously, evaded trampling and Cypress Spurge *Euphorbia cyparissias*, a scarce garden escape.

There was a good level of interest (both from group members and the older chap referred to above, who tagged along for a while) in the insects to be found on the common's more iconic plants, including Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Broom *Cytisus scoparius*. The former, for instance, offered up several Gorse Shieldbugs *Piezodorus lituratus*, while the latter yielded adults and nymphs of the plant bug *Heterocordylus tibialis*. The nymphs of *H. tibialis* are, when viewed under a hand lens, particularly striking, with their red-white-and-black abdominal banding (see photo [not from the day]). The meeting leader was somewhat perturbed, however, by some of those in attendance finding the St Mark's Fly to be a nuisance – was this not, after all, an insect meeting, he mused quietly to himself!?

Our afternoon extension into the Rothamsted Estate was pleasant enough, and while we did not find anything spectacular, we should be commended for resisting the urge to stray off the footpaths there.



Photo: Nymph of the plant bug *Heterocordylus tibialis* (photo by S. Rae [CC BY 2.0]).

Heteroptera: *Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale*, *Anthocoris nemorum*, *Coreus marginatus*, *Elasmotethus interstinctus*, *Harpocera thoracica*, *Heterocordylus tibialis*, *Liocoris tripustulatus*, *Nabis rugosus*, *Palomena prasina*, *Piezodorus lituratus*, *Stenodema laevigata*

Lepidoptera: Grey Gorse Piercer, Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner, Orange-tip, Peacock, Speckled Wood

Coleoptera: *Cantharis decipiens*, *Coccinella 7-punctata* (Seven-spot Ladybird), *Curculio glandium* (Acorn Weevil), *Harmonia axyridis* (Harlequin Ladybird), *Tatianaerhynchites aequatus*.

Other invertebrates: Ashy Mining Bee, Common Earwig, Lime Nail Gall Mite (galls seen), Nursery Web Spider, St Mark's Fly.

Birds: Blackcap, Blue Tit, Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Dunnock, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Green Woodpecker, Jackdaw, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Red Kite, Ring-Necked Parakeet, Robin, Skylark, Starling, Treecreeper (taking material to nest), Wood Pigeon, Wren.

[A full plant list was also supplied by Alla Mashanova, but space has not allowed us to include it all. Eds.]

Joe Gray

ST ALBANS

Saturday 13th May

9 members

It was not the brightest day when we met in a retail car park next to an Abbey line railway crossing in St Albans (tetrad TL10N). The plan was to explore the Nunnery Ruins, visit Watercress Nature Reserve and then to walk along the River Ver as far as the weather and wishes of the participants would take us.

A short walk towards the ruins was uneventful. The crossing was "well looked-after" and did not have nice things like Oxford Ragwort *Senecio squalidus* and Round-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium rotundifolium* which I recorded there in the previous season. The ruins themselves were also

cleaned a few months ago so it was not certain whether we would find anything on the walls. To our delight the cleaning was not thorough enough to kill everything and we found quite a range of both vascular plants and lichens.

Vascular plants from the walls: Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, Hart's Tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium*, Daisy *Bellis perennis*, Buddleia *Buddleja davidii*, Shepherd's Purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*, Hairy Bittercress *Cardamine hirsuta*, Sticky Mouse-ear *Cerastium glomeratum*, Rosebay Willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium*, Greater Celandine *Chelidonium majus*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Beaked Hawk's-beard *Crepis vesicaria*, Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*, Ivy *Hedera helix*, Green Alkanet *Pentaglottis sempervirens*, Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua*, Smooth Meadow-grass *Poa pratensis*, Mignonette *Reseda luteola*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., Annual Pearlwort *Sagina apetala/filicaulis*, Procumbent Pearlwort *Sagina procumbens*, Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*, Oxford Ragwort *Senecio squalidus*, Smooth Sowthistle *Sonchus oleraceus*, Dandelion *Taraxacum* agg., Common Nettle *Urtica dioica* subsp. *dioica*, Wall Speedwell *Veronica arvensis*.



Insects found near the ruins by Simon Knott: Harlequin Ladybird *Harmonia axyridis*, *Ischnomera cyanea* (a flower-beetle), and Murky-legged soldier-fly *Beris chalybata*. Birds recorded by Merle Gwyn were: Red Kite, Wood Pigeon, Blackbird, Robin, Blackcap, Great Tit, Wren, Dunnock, Magpie, Chaffinch, Goldfinch.

Our peaceful party was interrupted by the arrival of a team whose job was to fell some trees around the ruins. This set us moving off just in time to hear the roar of machinery behind us. We headed through Sopwell Nunnery open space towards the River Ver. In spite of a board telling us that this is a conservation area there was not much to see among nettles apart from an Osier tunnel planted a few years ago. We followed the Ver to the cycleway and crossed into the Watercress Nature Reserve.

Some noticeable plants along this stretch of Ver were: Crack Willow *Salix x fragilis*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Common Comfrey *Symphytum officinale*, Grey Poplar *Populus x canescens* and Reed Sweet-grass.

At Watercress Nature Reserve we were greeted by Margaret Harris, who is looking after the records and management plans. Margaret told us about the 25-year history of the reserve and showed a few photographs from the early days (looking more like a wasteland with no trees). It was neither easy nor sensible to stay as a group and we dispersed over the reserve looking at different groups of organisms (Paula Shipway and Andrew Harris focused on lichens, Simon Knott on insects, Merle Gwyn on birds and the rest of us on what their eyes fell upon). The most desirable group for recording was invertebrates but with little sun, to say the least, insects were not particularly active. Nevertheless, Simon did a great job in finding quite a few. Starring were two damselflies: Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrosoma nymphula* and Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*. Birds recorded by Merle were: Coot, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Wren, Jackdaw.

After having lunch in a private area of Watercress NR (many thanks to Margaret!), coloured by a male Bullfinch and accompanied by the calls of Song Thrush, Mallard, Swift, Greenfinch and Carrion Crow, we moved on south along the Ver. The newly-designed conservation area between Watercress NR and Sopwell Mill was not exciting botanically but Peter found Malachite Beetle *Malachius bipustulatus* and Black-headed Cardinal Beetle *Pyrochroa coccinea* there.



We walked along Cottonmill Lane into tetrad TL10M and to the next conservation area along the Ver beyond Sopwell House. A man hosing a car in the street kindly stopped to let us pass but promised to catch us on the way back. We did not mention that we were coming back along a different route.

The footpath along the Ver was very quiet. There was some Butterbur *Petasites hybridus* on the edge and lots of non-fruiting Water-starwort *Callitriche* in the water. We regretted that Trevor James was not with us to tell us which species of Water-starwort this was. There was lots of flowering Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga* on the sides but we did not see other water speedwells or obvious crow-foots which I hoped to spot. Probably extremely

low water level was partly to blame (and obvious cattle visits to the places where I saw crow-foots in the past). Another interesting finding was thanks to Michael Demidecki, who was looking for Alders, hoping to get a picture of root nodules. A tree he spotted happened to be Grey Alder *Alnus incana*, rather than the common one. Unfortunately for Michael, it was on the other side of the stream and trying to get to its roots looked rather dangerous.

After we left the Ver we passed through the streets towards the car park, past Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea* and Dove's-foot Crane's-bill *Geranium molle*, and had a discussion about the colour of the juice of a long-headed poppy. It was cream(-ish) colour but we agreed on white (making it *Papaver dubium*), since it was closer to white than to yellow. Paula pointed out Wall-rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria* on a railway bridge, which I managed to miss even though I had walked there probably hundreds of times! The sun came out and we saw Orange-tip *Anthocaris cardamines* and Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus* flying around. To finish our walk, there were two magnificent Pedunculate Oaks *Quercus robur*, with very low, horizontal branches (Jean Williamson commented that it was perfect for climbing and also conveniently situated at the edge of a playground) and the hybrid oak *Quercus x rosea* which had probably been laid in a hedge in the past and had a long (and thick!) horizontal section. A Grey Squirrel crossing the road reminded us that we did not see any other mammal during the day.

As we almost passed my house I offered a cup of tea to anyone who would like it. Paula kindly accepted the offer and a cup of tea turned into (at least partial) lichen recording in my garden for which I am very grateful indeed!

Lichens found in my garden (TL10M) were: *Lecidella stigmatea*, *Lecanora albescens*, *Verrucaria nigrescens* and *Verrucaria muralis* on a stone wall, *Aspicilia contorta* on concrete slabs and a big patch of *Cladonia sp.* (with no podetia) in a flower pot.

Alla Mashanova

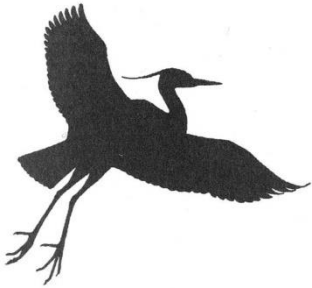




Examining Barn Owl pellets
Near Reed – 18th March 2017



Looking for water beetles in a cattle trough
Near Wormley West End – 15th April 2017



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