

BRITISH NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION
Hertfordshire Branch

BULLETIN No.137

December 2017 – August 2018



Looking for the 'bulbs' at the base of Bulbous Buttercup
Weston Hills Nature Reserve, Baldock

13th May 2018

Photo: Paula Shipway

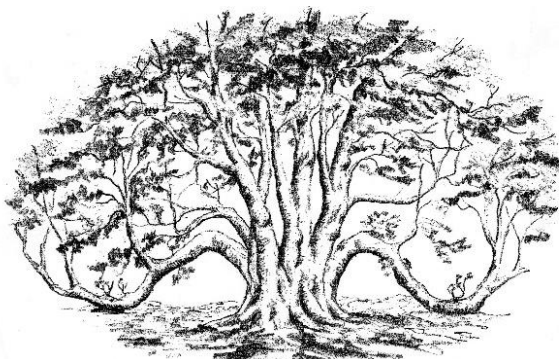


Checking the identification of 'weeds' at Rickmansworth
6th January 2018
(Photo: Paula Shipway)



Collecting beetles in a soggy field near Chiswell Green
31st March 2018
(Photo: Paula Shipway)

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EDITOR'S BIT

It is dusk just now and the Song Thrush is singing 'be quick be quick' as I am attempting to, at long last, finalise the bulletin. The day time activities of Meadow Brown and Marbled White Butterflies in the wildflower meadow have ceased as night time has arrived. I have had record numbers of Marbled White in the garden this year and I see they were prominent among the records of the field meetings such as those at King's Meads and Jersey Farm. During the day a Bank Vole often forages under the bird feeders, emerging warily from the ivy which grows beneath the hedge, darting back to cover at the slightest movement, only to emerge a few minutes later. So, having had several entertaining moments watching it, I can imagine the group's delight at finding a Harvest Mouse on the Wallingford meeting. The bulletin is both a record of wildlife and personal experiences of wildlife and this issue celebrates the achievements of some of our members who have brought the natural world to life.



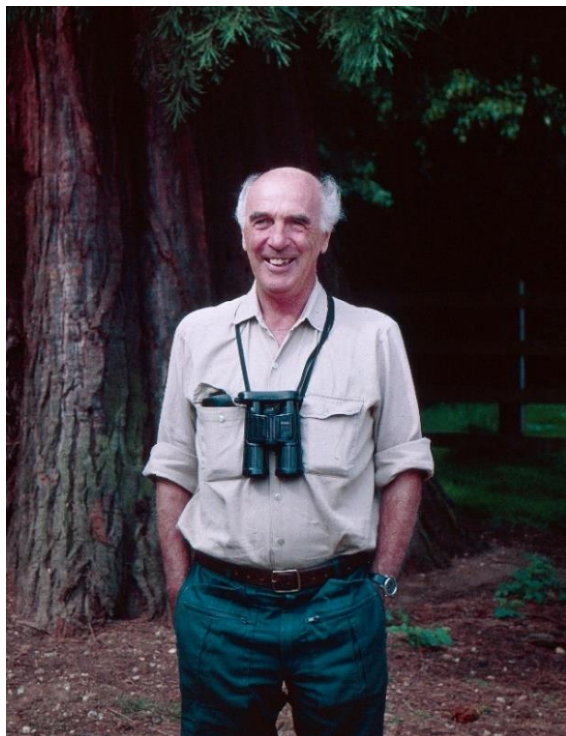
Photo June Crew

Congratulations to Trevor James, pictured left, on winning the Gilbert White Adult Award for recording of terrestrial and freshwater wildlife - at the UK awards for biological recording and information....and to Kerry Robinson on receiving the Hertfordshire Natural History Society's 1875 award – you can read about that on page 9. We also celebrate the life and huge contribution to natural history of Bryan Sage who, very sadly, died at the end of last year. So, thank you to all who have inspired us in our interest.

OBITUARY

Bryan Sage (6th August 1930 – 30th November 2018)

Longstanding member of the Hertfordshire Branch



Bryan Sage at Panshanger c.1990.

Photo: Michael Clark

Bryan Leonard Sage was born in East Barnet on 6th August 1930. In 1945 he found employment with S.H. Lock, a firm of purchasing agents in Hadley Wood. Bryan joined the firm the same day as June Pearton, who later became the national secretary of the British Naturalists' Association. June's husband to be, John who was already working for S.H. Lock, was one of a group of four who founded the North Middlesex Branch (as it was then called) of BNA, and it was John who introduced Bryan to BNA. Bryan later became chairman, and then vice-president of the Branch.

Bryan was called up for national service from 1948 to 1950, serving in the Army Emergency Reserve (Royal Armoured Corps). On discharge he returned to working for S.H. Lock. In 1957 he joined the British Petroleum Company (BP), serving in Iraq (with its subsidiary Khanaqin Oil Company) and Aden (with BP). The visit to Iraq was a momentous occasion for the newly married couple, not least because a revolution ensued while they were there. After returning to the UK, Bryan and Audrey's daughter Annette was born on 24th June 1959.

In 1969 Bryan was asked to work in Alaska, his task being to organise a preliminary ecological survey along the proposed route of the Trans Alaska 48-inch crude oil pipeline, which was to carry oil some 800 miles from Prudhoe Bay in the north to Valdez in the south. He put together a team of scientists and began his field work (which was to take three years) in 1969. He told a reporter from the Barnet Press in 1973 that “the lonely silent wastelands of Alaska are the nearest you can get to a natural existence”. He recalled that a plane once flew on a round trip of 600 miles to drop him a message which read “Would you please phone the manager at his office.” Bryan commented to the reporter “I hadn’t a hope in hell of complying. The nearest phone was 300 miles across rugged country!” After returning from Alaska Bryan spent three years in the Shetland Islands, his work being to establish a system for monitoring the populations of seabirds, which would provide an early indication of problems in the event of an undetected spillage of oil.

Bryan resigned from BP in 1978 and, from then until 1980, served as Environmental Consultant to the *New Scientist* magazine. It must have been in 1968, when Bryan was about 38, that I first met him, on my first ramble with the, by then, Hertfordshire & North Middlesex Branch, and we remained friends ever since. Bryan was always great fun to be with and both he and Audrey were very instrumental in the expansion and popularity of our branch. I was always pleased when he and Audrey were part of the rambling group. Bryan was writing regularly for the Barnet Press then. I recall a rookery survey that he was carrying out, with publicity for this being afforded by that local paper. I remember Audrey recalling how someone had phoned asking how he could tell if a Rook’s nest was occupied or not. Her reply was that he should throw a stone and if a Rook came out it was occupied!

On one occasion during a winter week-end away in Norfolk, our group was at the end of Holkham Park lake. We were watching a bird in the lake from the raised bank when for some reason it took off, flying low over our heads. Bryan grabbed the bird in mid-flight – it was a Red-necked Grebe and we were all able to examine it closely!

In 1966, before I joined the Branch, the book *Northaw Great Wood: its History and Natural History*, written by members of our Branch, had been

published by Hertfordshire County Council. Bryan edited this book. In the forward to the book Maxwell Knight wrote that "... the whole book just goes to show what a body of amateur naturalists - all members of one society - can do. What a pity it is that more of our many similar bodies cannot do the same."

Bryan had previously written *A History of the Birds of Hertfordshire*, published in 1959, and Sir Peter Scott wrote the forward to that. Later Bryan was to co-author *The Birds of Hertfordshire* with the Revd Tom Gladwin. Tom was elected as our Branch's Hon. Vice-president at the AGM of our Branch on 19th January 2019, a position which Bryan held until his untimely death.

In 1981 Bryan and Audrey moved to their last home, at Wells-next-the-Sea. It was sad to lose them from Hertfordshire. Rambles with the Hertfordshire Branch of BNA were never quite the same without him. But he and Audrey returned several times to the county and my family and I enjoyed several visits to their home in Norfolk. Bryan continued to be active in the natural history world, albeit now in Norfolk, and took part in winter wildfowl counts, embarked on a study of the Egyptian Goose in Holkham Park and continued to collect and mount beetles. He had his own special places, apart from the marshes near his home, where he collected beetles, including Swanton Novers Wood and the Stanford Training Area (STANTA) in Breckland, for which he had a permit. Bryan was an inspiration to many including myself and Trevor James, who co-dedicated his book *Beetles of Hertfordshire* (published in 2018) "Also, to Bryan Sage, for his initial encouragement and ongoing enthusiasm for beetles over many years."

There is much more that I could have written. Bryan wrote other books, and published many papers too during his career, which I referred to in my earlier profile for *Country-Side* (Demidecki, 2015). He and Audrey are buried in the same grave in Wells Town Cemetery. May their souls rest in peace.

Reference:

Demidecki, M. (2015). 'Bryan Sage, C.Biol., M.S.B., a profile: a lifetime's work in conservation and promoting our understanding of natural history', *Country-Side*, 34 (2): 12-13.

Mike Demidecki

CONGRATULATIONS TO KERRY ROBINSON

A presentation made at the 2018 Hertfordshire Natural History Society A.G.M.

“If you’ve never been much interested in fungi, you would be forgiven for asking: ‘Kerry Robinson – who’s she?’ You probably/possibly have never seen her, as she has a job that means she works on a Saturday. Her legendary fungus forays are always on a Sunday. Happily, she has been given leave of absence for this special afternoon.

I first met Kerry about 25 years ago when I had the audacity to lead a fungus foray around Astonbury Wood. Kerry and her mother, her sister and her dog, Pepsi, were there and, as we all laid out our finds, I became conscious that here was someone who knew infinitely more about the subject than I did. I have been tagging along on her Sunday forays ever since hoping that I can absorb some of her knowledge by osmosis...

Kerry has always been curious about everything around her. As soon as she was able to walk any distance, her mother, Pat, took her to the Weston Hills, thus fostering her interests in the flowers and creatures they saw. One of her very earliest memories was being fascinated at seeing Candle-snuff fungus. So, her interest in fungi seems a little like love at first sight!

From a very early age she named and wrote down everything she found from bugs to buttercups sending her records when she was just out of her teens to the county recorders. She is a self-taught, brilliant all-round naturalist who just happens to specialise in fungi and if you’re thinking ‘colourful toadstools’, think again. Microfungi are her particular interest. Through a lens – an essential tool for any naturalist - they are just as beautiful and colourful as the macro sort.

Isn’t it every naturalist’s dream to discover a species not previously seen in Britain? Kerry has discovered over 25 species of fungi new to Britain. She has written a number of papers on fungi and rusts for *The Mycologist* and *The Field Mycologist* journals. She has even found a species of *Inocybe* new to science, but this has yet to be verified. I asked her how many fungi occur in Herts. She has never counted how many she has personally seen – several

thousand at least - but said that over 800 species had been found in Gobions Wood alone.

Kerry was once able to respond to a request from a BBC film unit in Bristol for a particular slime mould – one that looks a little like spilt custard. She obliged by finding a good specimen, which was collected by a courier and rushed to Bristol where it was filmed for a natural history programme using a time-lapse camera to show how it changed shape.

Self-taught, Kerry's university is the countryside, of which she is a professor. Her knowledge is prodigious and she is internationally known and respected. But it's her willingness to share her enthusiasm and knowledge with others that gets my vote. I will continue to stumble along behind her and her newest dog, Cookie, for as long as I am able. I am honoured and have tremendous pleasure in presenting Kerry Robinson with the Herts Natural History Society's 1875 Award."

June Crew



Kerry and her mother Pat with the 1875 Award – a beautiful engraved glass plaque – Photo June Crew

TRING RESERVOIRS

Saturday 25th November

5 members

Five of us met on this cold sunny autumn morning, the temperature when we met at Startops End Reservoir car park being 2°C. House Sparrow and Dunnock were seen near the car park.

On the Grand Union canal there were Mute Swan, Canada Geese and Mallard, with a Robin nearby and, on Startops End Reservoir, we noted Pochard, Gadwall, Teal and Tufted Duck. A Redwing stood still on a hawthorn bush for a long while, long enough to persuade me to unpack my camera, but to no avail - the bird had flown by the time I was ready! We walked on between Startops End and Marsworth Reservoirs, noting Mistletoe in a tree between the two reservoirs.

Marsworth Reservoir held a Pied Wagtail, several Great Crested Grebes, Tufted Ducks, Shoveler, Black-headed Gulls, and a Kingfisher (which flew across by the reed bed) and on Tringford Reservoir we noted more Shoveler, Coots, Grey Herons (five standing on the mud – there was much mud exposed at the north end of the reservoir), many Black-headed Gulls, Teal, Moorhens and Grey Wagtail. From Tringford Reservoir we walked along the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal, which was still being restored (the restoration seems to be taking an awfully long time).

We descended then towards Wilstone Reservoir and walked in an anticlockwise direction around it. Jill Saunders pointed out a Long-tailed Tit's nest made of moss in Goosegrass by the moss-covered trunks of Elder trees. At Wilstone Reservoir, Water Stitchwort was still in flower on the wall. We were hoping to see the Snow Bunting which had been around for a couple of days but, alas, there was no sign of it today! We made our way along the path to the hide, noting a solitary Yew tree, about 5ft 6in high, and a Norway Maple tree. Treecreeper and Goldcrest were recorded here. From the hide we observed a flotilla of 9 Little Grebes, a Green Sandpiper, a Meadow Pipit and Grey Wagtail on the mud, Pied Wagtail and a Black-tailed Godwit. William Bishop exclaimed excitedly that this (the Black-tailed Godwit) was the 160th bird species he had seen so far this year in Hertfordshire. We

toasted his success with our coffee! There were Lapwings on the reservoir (but sadly no Golden Plovers) and Snipe too (three by the reed bed).

We walked then towards Drayton Beauchamp, noting first the splendid Field Maple trees alongside Wilstone Reservoir. (The previous week they had looked spectacular with their bright yellow leaves in the sunlight. Now they were mostly without leaves - what a difference a week makes!). A Treecreeper made its way round and up an Ash tree. I tried to photograph this bird too but my efforts brought laughter as the bird outwitted me and did not allow itself to be photographed! There was a Red Kite in the air over the fields, also a Magpie. Jackdaws called from the wood. We skirted the church of St. Mary the Virgin and descended to the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal, making our way north-eastwards back to Tringford Reservoir. An Ox-eye Daisy was still in flower alongside the Wendover Arm. We surprised a Kingfisher sitting on the wall and there were Red-legged Partridges in the nearby field. A Stock Dove was also seen and there was a Greenfinch too. Back in Startops End Reservoir car park three of us finished off the day with a welcome cup of tea at the Bluebell café.

Birds: Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Shoveler, Teal, Mallard, Red Kite, Kestrel, Coot, Moorhen, Pheasant, Red-legged Partridge, Black-tailed Godwit, Green Sandpiper, Snipe, Lapwing, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Kingfisher, Skylark, Fieldfare, Redwing, Blackbird, Robin, Goldcrest, Great Tit, Treecreeper, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Greenfinch, House Sparrow.

Mammals: Moles - of special note were the several groups of freshly dug Mole hills, evidence perhaps of the Moles having moved into their deeper winter headquarters and clearing out blocked runways underground. These were noted at: SB919139 (in Buckinghamshire, in bank of Startops End Reservoir); SP908133 and SP905135 (both in Hertfordshire and along bank of Wilstone Reservoir); SP909126 (in Hertfordshire, alongside Wendover Arm of Grand Union Canal); SP917138 (In Hertfordshire, in bank of Startops End reservoir). Grey Squirrel: SP917131 (in Hertfordshire, by Tringford Reservoir).

Mike Demidecki

LEMSFORD SPRINGS NATURE RESERVE

Saturday 9th December

4 members, 2 guests

Jean Williamson, Alla Mashanova, William Bishop and Andrew Harris plus two members of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust met outside the entrance of the reserve on a frosty but sunny morning.

In Alder trees near the entrance, William spied a flock of Siskins as well as 10 Mallard swimming on the north lagoon. Lemsford Springs contains several lagoons, formerly watercress beds, which are important habitat for water birds. As the lagoons are spring-fed, they never freeze in winter, making it ideal conditions for watercress to grow and for shrimps, snails and fish to live, providing a food supply for wading birds.

In the surrounding bushes between Meadow Bridge and the hide were Goldcrest, Magpie, Wren, Robin, Dunnock and a Black-headed Gull prospecting for food in the horse paddock.

Observing from the hide we saw Green Sandpiper, Pied and Grey Wagtails, several Moorhens, Carrion Crow and a good view of a Kingfisher.



Kingfisher at Lemsford Springs. Photo: Merle Gwyn.

From across the main lagoon came the commotion of stress calls from Blackbirds and Chaffinches. We soon discovered the cause; these small birds were mobbing a Tawny Owl trying to reverse out from an owl box attached to a tree. It was suspected that the owl may have been feeding whilst its head was inside the box. The small birds scattered as soon as the owl flew off.



The Tawny owl peering cautiously from a nest box

Photo: Merle Gwyn

We continued towards the second hide, with views of Little Egret and again Green Sandpiper. Many Green Sandpipers are being ringed, as it is suspected they are becoming resident on site. Other sightings from the hide were a Red Kite soaring high looking for prey, a pair of Cormorants, a Sparrowhawk hawking over the Main Lagoon and three Ring-necked Parakeets, probably from a local roost at Stanborough Lakes. We were just about to leave the hide when, in the sunlight, we had a clear view of a Muntjac deer wading across the Back Channel.

We continued across the Island Bridge into Island Wood and on towards the marsh. Two Mistle Thrushes sat conveniently on a fence giving us good views, and the flock of approximately 25 Siskins still perched quietly in the top of Alder trees, their yellow plumage looking splendid in the morning sunshine. In the distance we heard the call of a Green Woodpecker and the

mewing of a Buzzard. Just outside the Reserve Andrew observed a Treecreeper.

At this stage the group split up, with some members continuing elsewhere on a self-led walk.

Merle Gwyn

STOCKER'S LAKE

Saturday 6th January 2018

5 members

The day started with a moderate frost but became pleasant, with sunshine and light cloud. We were lucky to miss any rain. It was one of those cold but ideal days for a good walk and a nice start to the New Year. We met on the lane to Stocker's Farm by the pumping station. It had been a comparatively mild winter and consequently the number of birds pushed south had been more restricted. We certainly had fewer species than had been previously here. One species which has increased though is Ring-necked Parakeet and there were few points in the day when we did not have these noisy birds around us. They were almost continuously seen or heard. We added to the day by helping Alla Mashanova to record as many species of plants in flower as we could, which I believe gave us all quite a lot of extra fun.

We set off around the south side of Stocker's Lake. Most of the common ducks were located fairly easily, but highlights were the Goldeneye; the males often displaying to the females. Jean Williamson was particularly delighted with the Great Crested Grebes that had started to do their wonderful courtship dances, diving for weed, then meeting breast to breast and rising from the water and falling back to a head-nodding display. Joe Gray picked out a strange duck under some vegetation and gave us our only sighting of Red-crested Pochards, mostly asleep but with an occasional movement. We moved along and met a local birdwatcher with whom we swapped notes. He had obviously been out longer but had little more than us.

Leaving Stocker's, we headed along the river to a point opposite the sewage works, Alla and Paula Shipway noting a few lichens on the fence rails. In one field was a beautiful Mistle Thrush. We had proceeded at a very gentle pace, very much just enjoying the things we passed, and as time had gone more

quickly than anticipated we took a short cut up the hill here. Within yards we arrived at a bench, dedicated to Linda Smith and her horse, so stopped for lunch. Whilst we ate, two of her friends passed and stopped to talk to us and it was only at this point we realised the second name on the plaque was a horse. The Parakeets were having their lunch too, on fallen apples under a tree nearby. We then made our way towards Hill End. Here we crossed the road and entered the 'Goose Field'. This is our third time here and the field is always full of geese. Strangely they all seem to have a favoured bit; the Greylags gather near the footpath, the Canadas just over the brow of the hill and the Egyptians near the barn. The maize field that in previous winters was full of finches was this year devoid of birds, which was a pity.

We headed down towards Woodcock Hill, firstly to admire the architectural winter stems of dead Giant Hogweed (new for Joe) and then watch a splendid dog Fox. He watched us with interest from a field boundary before heading back into the trees behind, obviously having decided we really weren't that fascinating after all. On the way Paula introduced me to *Hyperphyscia adglutinata* (a lichen) - always good to be formally introduced! Next, we skirted the golf course, adding flowering Gorse to the list, musing over the habits of Gorse Shieldbugs and collecting lost golf balls. Arriving on the outskirts of Batchworth, we studied the garden weeds and lawns for any additions to the flowering flora and were delighted to find several Earthtongues (Geoglossaceae). There are three species of these fungi which all look very similar and unfortunately none of us were mycologists with enough knowledge to separate them, but they were the cherry on our cake and a lovely end to the day. We got to 46 birds and, I think, about 35 plants in flower.

Thank you to all who came. It was a lovely day, good company, cheerful talk, a pleasant stroll and good fun plant hunting too.

William Bishop

Mammals: Grey Squirrel, Red Fox, Rabbit, Reeve's Muntjac, Human (far too many).

Birds: Grey Heron, Cormorant, Great Crested Grebe, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Egyptian Goose, Goldeneye, Pochard, Red-crested Pochard, Tufted

Duck, Gadwall, Wigeon, Shoveler, Mallard, Red Kite, Buzzard, Pheasant, Moorhen, Lapwing, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Common Gull, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Feral Pigeon, Collared Dove, Ring-necked Parakeet, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare, Redwing, Robin, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Starling, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

Plants: see below the list of the flowering plants - it was really a collective effort! William was right every time when I was not sure. 34 species altogether (maybe *Typha latifolia* was not very clearly in flower though...)

Alla Mashanova.

<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy
<i>Campanula poscharskyana</i>	Trailing Bellflower
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	Shepherd's Purse
<i>Cardamine hirsuta</i>	Hairy Bitter-cress
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	Common Mouse-ear
<i>Cerastium glomeratum</i>	Sticky Mouse-ear
<i>Conyza sumatrensis</i>	Guernsey Fleabane
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	Smooth Hawksbeard
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cocksfoot
<i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i>	Sun Spurge
<i>Euphorbia peplus</i>	Petty Spurge
<i>Geranium pusillum</i>	Small-flowered Cranesbill
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Herb Bennet
<i>Helleborus foetidus</i>	Stinking Hellebore
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed
<i>Lamium album</i>	White Dead-nettle
<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	Red Dead-nettle
<i>Matricaria discoidea</i>	Pineappleweed
<i>Poa annua</i>	Annual Meadow-grass

<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	Primrose
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	Bramble
<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	Groundsel
<i>Stellaria graminea</i>	Lesser Stitchwort
<i>Stellaria media</i>	Common Chickweed
<i>Taraxacum</i> agg.	Dandelion
<i>Typha latifolia</i>	Bulrush
<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	Gorse
<i>Veronica persica</i>	Common Field Speedwell
<i>Viburnum tinus</i>	Laurustinus (garden escape)
<i>Vinca minor</i>	Lesser Periwinkle (garden escape)

LITTLE GADDESSEN

Saturday 3rd February 2018

4 members

Although Little Gaddesden and the surrounding area lies within the county of Hertfordshire, the vice-county border between Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire deviates and is more or less parallel with the main village road. My plan was that we should cross the border into the vice-county of Buckinghamshire for part of the route in order to find an interesting circuit, so great care needed to be taken over where we were for recording purposes!

As the day was forecast to be cold and mostly wet, I was not expecting a big turnout so was pleased when four hardy members arrived to meet me in the car park. As we gathered, I made a few records of common lichens growing on the trunk of a nearby Ash tree: *Phlyctis argena*, *Parmotrema perlatum*, *Lepraria incana*, *Melanelixia subaurifera*, *Lecanora expallens*, *Flavoparmelia caperata* and *Parmelia sulcata*.

Lichenologists tend to move at a snail's pace, so in order to prevent hypothermia from setting in I knew we shouldn't spend too long in any one place. We set off, pausing to look at some fine specimens of fertile *Fuscidea lightfootii* on the wooden railings round a tree on the village green. I then pointed out a few species on the twigs of a cherry tree, firstly Andrew's

favourite lichen, *Physcia aipolia*, along with *Physcia tenella*, *Physcia adscendens* and *Xanthoria parietina*. A wooden bench directly below a tree demonstrated that twig species are just as happy on lignum as it was well decorated with *Lecidella eleaochroma* and *Lecanora chlarotera*. We followed the path along the edge of the green, noting *Lecanora muralis* on the tarmac path, and we stopped for a while by a lovely old limestone wall which I learned from a local resident was built during the 1930's.

A good community of lichens had established itself on the wall including *Protoblastenia rupestris*, which is perhaps easier to identify than some other species due to its orange fruiting bodies. The species list from the wall included *Lecania erysibe*, *Lecanora campestris*, *Caloplaca flavescens*, *Caloplaca dichroa*, *Caloplaca flavocitrina*, *Lecanora albescens*, *Verrucaria nigrescens* f. *tectorum*, *Diplotomma alboatrum*, *Toninia aromatica*, *Caloplaca oasis*, *Caloplaca limonia*, as well as abundant and well- formed *Verrucaria muralis* on the mortar, *Thelidium incavatum* and a lovely example of *Aspicilia contorta* f. *contorta*.

As always, we were looking out for anything of interest and we had a good view of a Jay flying over the village green. We also had an early sighting of Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*, in flower, no doubt encouraged to flower because of the sheltered position close to the wall. The appropriately named Wall Speedwell *Veronica arvensis*, was growing on top of the wall and as we moved on, I added two more plants in flower to the list, Hairy bittercress *Cardamine hirsuta* and Red Dead-nettle *Lamium purpureum*.

An old wooden bench on the green had a good covering of *Cladonia coniocraea* but it was the discovery of a spectacular fungus growing under a Beech hedge that had members reaching for their cameras. The Earth Star, *Geastrum triplex*, must have measured at least 10 centimetres across.

Further along the path Andrew Harris pointed out the remains of a large colony of Grey Sedge *Carex divulsa* and I then realised that the excitement of the Earth Star had caused me to miss our footpath across to the Church so we had to back track for a few yards. The path passed a sports field and we hurried past in order to keep warm and to dodge any badly aimed footballs. Halfway across to the church we stopped to look at the trunk of an Ash tree and noted a few more lichens, including *Ramalina farinacea*, *Hypotrachyna*

afrorevoluta and *Punctelia subrudecta* and *Cliostomum griffithii* growing in the shelter provided by the leaning trunk.

A field away from the church I pointed out the sawn-off stump of an old veteran tree. The stump didn't appear to be of much interest but during my exploration of the area before the meeting I had paused for a rest and noticed some discolouration on top of the stump. After taking a closer look through my hand lens I saw the 'jam tart' fruits of a lichen that reminded me



of a species that I had been shown the previous year in Hatfield Forest. I was proved to be right and recorded the first *Lecanora sarcopidoides* for Hertfordshire. There are only a dozen records for Great Britain, with four in the south-east region. I reassured the group that when it was dry it was far better looking!

We paid a brief visit to the church to check to see if another interesting lichen was still flourishing. Andrew had recorded *Dermatocarpon minatum* during the winter of 2013/14 and we were pleased to see that it was still happy and that the colony had grown despite the close proximity of a flower pot. Perhaps the pot provided a little shelter.

Alla Mashanova ventured a little further into the churchyard and found a moss, *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*, before we moved off along the track past the church. The post and wire fence along the edge of the track had been in need of repair and it was pleasing to note that the landowner had added new fence posts but not removed the old ones. These old posts provided a good habitat for lichens that need acidic conditions and I noted *Parmelia saxatilis*, *Trapeliopsis flexuosa*, *Cladonia coniocraea* and *Flavoparmelia caperata*. We also noted a few particularly large ant hills below the fence as we followed the track back towards the northern edge of the village. A herd of approximately 40 Fallow Deer stood still and turned their heads to watch us before making off and we paused to admire some fine-looking cattle, which were white with black ears and noses and had long horns. We felt that we should recognise the breed so were pleased when the farmer stopped to talk to us. He explained that they were White Park cattle and are an endangered breed.

As we crossed muddy fields to reach the village, we paused to admire a couple of veteran Field Maple trees in a hedgerow. Old Field Maples can provide a hotspot for lichens and I added a few new species to the list from the trunks: *Hyperphyscia adglutinata*, *Lecania naegeli*, *Diploicia canescens* and *Phaeophyscia orbicularis* along with a lichenicolous fungus *Lichenochora obscurioides*, which is a new record for Hertfordshire and was identified by Mark Powell who is the country's leading lichenicolous fungi expert. *Ramalina fastigiata* was also recorded growing on the branches. Another highlight from a Field Maple trunk was a healthy specimen of Common Sorrel *Rumex, acetosa* growing in a crevice in the bark.

We had to go through a gate before reaching the road and I noted *Lecanora conizaeoides* growing on one of the gate posts. This species of lichen is in rapid decline due to the changes in atmospheric pollution. Another plant in flower, Common Chickweed *Stellaria media*, grew below the gate and was added to the list.

We walked along the pavement back towards the centre of the village then turned off onto a footpath opposite the Bridgewater Arms public house and I think we were lucky not to have lost one member of the group enticed by the thought of the hospitality on offer.

A few yards along this path we crossed over the border into Vice-county 24 (Buckinghamshire) and almost immediately I recorded one of the more frequent pin lichens *Chaenotheca ferruginea* on the trunk of an Oak tree. On another Oak trunk there was a fertile specimen of *Cliostomum griffithii*. This species is more commonly found in its sterile state in our region. Shortly after this we stopped for lunch and Andrew heard a Marsh Tit calling. We followed a path that ran parallel with the village road but this time to the south of the village. In a wooded area I pointed out a small branch lying on the ground that had a rather depauperate but interesting lichen growing on it, *Platismatia glauca*, which resembles lettuce. Another branch lying on the ground had an interesting species too, *Melanohalea exasperatula*, which is the fourth county record and was growing alongside some more common lichens.



We came out of the wooded area and crossed an open area of grassland which is popular with dog walkers. Along the southern edge are a few old Oak trees and I was able to show members *Hypocenomyce scalaris* growing on the trunk of one of these trees. This lichen is formed from overlapping squamules and puts me in mind of roof pantiles. A Hawthorn tree had a particularly good example of *Anisomeridium polypori* on the trunk. Shortly afterwards we were pleased to note another sign of Spring coming, the leaves of Pignut *Conopodium majus* emerging in amongst the grasses.

At this point we were very close to our cars and I had planned a short loop as a possible extension to the meeting if energy levels and enthusiasm were still high. Everyone opted to continue despite the rain so we re-crossed the border back into Vice-county 20 (Hertfordshire). A short distance along an old ride along the edge of the Golden Valley there is a bridge over a side-valley and we stopped to look at more trees. An Ash tree was well colonised with *Lecanactis abietina* and a little searching revealed the fruiting bodies of *Dimerella pineti*, also on an Ash tree.

There were some lovely ferns growing on the renovated walls of the brick bridge: Hart's-tongue Fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* and Maidenhair Spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes*, which we admired before moving off to continue on our way amongst the mature trees growing on the edge of the valley. I was pleased to find *Graphis scripta* growing on the trunks of a few of the Beech trees.

We examined a heavily shaded flint wall on either side of a path leading down from the village road and found *Verrucaria elaenea* growing in its typical habitat. Further along the wall Alla spotted a moss and later had it identified as *Bryum capillare*. Before turning to follow a path back to the car park we admired a splendid hollow veteran Beech tree with buttresses around some of the base. At the base of the tree in a sheltered position in-between two of the buttresses I discovered another lichen *Opegrapha vermicellifera* that looks similar to the *Lecanactis abietina* that we saw earlier during the walk but grows in a different habitat and is easily separated by a chemical test.

We made our way back to the cars after an enjoyable although chilly day and recorded one final lichen for the day by spotting *Arthonia spadicea* on the

main trunk of mature ivy. I hope that we all ended the day having learned just a little about the natural history of the area.

Alla kindly provided me with her list of **plants in flower** so I have included those that I missed in my write-up:

Daisy, Shepherd's Purse, Hazel, Early Crocus, Winter Aconite, Petty Spurge, Snowdrop, White Dead-nettle, Dog's Mercury, Annual Meadow-grass, Primrose, Gorse, Common Field Speedwell, Greater Periwinkle.

William Bishop also helped me out with his bird list.

Birds: Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Dunnock, Wren, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Starling, Magpie, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch.

Paula Shipway



A Collared Earthstar *Geastrum triplex* found under a hedge

Photo: Paula Shipway

WALLINGTON

Saturday 17th February 2018

10 Members

This walk took us from Wallington to Clothall, with a return journey via Shaw Green and Redhill. I became curious about the name Clothall and, on getting home, looked it up in the Oxford Name Companion, where I found 'Clatheala – Nook of land where burdock grows'. I don't recall seeing burdock, but we were probably too early for it. A pleasing name to a naturalist though.

We were fortunate with the weather which, for the time of year, was glorious; more like April in my memory. It was cool and started sunny with thin cloud later. I travelled to the meeting with Joe Gray and we were lucky to see a Corn Bunting and two Grey Partridges *en route*. Wallington church has been host to Hawfinches for some time but they were absent on our visit, sadly. It was good to have Trevor James join us for the day. As he arrived, a Tawny Owl hooted from close by; that's how to make an entrance with your own fanfare!

As we prepared to leave, a Sparrowhawk shot over the field. We left Wallington along the Icknield Way Trail, which passes along the ridge. From here you get a broad panorama across the valley below. Along the track we came across Badger footprints in the mud. In the field close to Quickswood Farm Joe spotted a tiny mouse in the emerging cereal crop, I managed to pick it up, but it escaped rather swiftly, although most managed to see it before it hid in a tussock. Its back was a pretty ginger colour, it had tiny ears and a moderate tail length; a Harvest Mouse. For many of us it was the first one we had seen in the wild and was a moment of great pleasure.



A few yards further on we encountered an old Whitethroat nest in the hedge, probably unused; Simon Knott told us how the males make several and the female chooses the one she likes best. Almost everywhere we went we saw deer slots in the mud. Those of keener perception noted the smell of Foxes in several places. I never seem to pick it up. We encountered a Yellowhammer flock, golden jewels in the light, and a Corn Bunting was heard

by Trevor, but we failed to see it. Clothall church was rather fine perched on its knoll in the trees, although someone had planted conifers below it, which will spoil the view from some angles; people do odd things. Skylarks were abundant, and the air was full of their singing. This is great joy to me as it is my favourite bird song; to lie in sunshine and hear Skylarks overhead is bliss. I want Heaven to be full of Skylarks, small blue butterflies, tiny purple orchids and scented with Thyme and Marjoram in short springy turf.

I had intended to break for lunch in Clothall but we pressed on to Clothallbury Wood to find more shelter. Most opted for the wood, but Simon and I stood outside to watch for birds. It was a perfect day for Buzzards and Red Kites, several being on the wing. We noted an Alder in flower in the copse margin. Fox-tail Feather-moss *Thamnobryum alopecurum* was seen by Alla Mashanova. After lunch we entered Bush Spring, where Joe spotted the gall of the wasp *Diastrophus rubi* on brambles. This is a sausage shaped gall along the stem of the plant in which the larvae overwinter, up to 200 of them. I have only seen a very old gall once before, so it was good to see fresh examples. We found a further two galls. A few Fallow Deer were seen in the field by the wood. As we came to the end of Bush Spring a deep throated 'kronk' was heard and we realised there was a Raven close by. There were further kronks and I managed to locate the bird in a hedgerow tree, but it took to the wing before we could all see it. Julie Wise was pleased to have heard it though and was determined to listen out for Ravens in future. Further along the track, the Hertfordshire Way, we encountered emerging Seven-spot Ladybirds and Trevor found a *Tachyporus hypnorum* beetle; harbingers of Spring.

We had made good time and it was only around two o'clock, so, at Trevor's suggestion, we headed down to look at Wallington Common. This is much overgrown now. The next find was a pair of bird's legs hanging in a bush. We thought they had most likely belonged to a Partridge, just possibly the remains of a raptor's dinner that had been dropped from the trees above. A Treecreeper was seen in the canopy by some. Further on, a Goldcrest gave most of us good views, always a little gem. After Redhill we headed towards Bury Farm. In the fields on the Roe Green side were 45 Fallow Deer resting in the crop and near the farm a large flock of Fieldfares were busy in the longer grass.



Back at Wallington we looked in the village well to admire the splendid colony of Greater Water-moss *Fontinalis antipyretica*.

Alla, yet again, kept a list of vascular plants in flower for us, which adds fun to the day. We achieved 22 this time; fewer than before but I expect we were generally in more exposed terrain. Some were possibly neglected plantings, like Winter Aconite and Lenten Rose, but still good to see.

Bird-wise we achieved a reasonable list, although some were only heard and others were only seen by those lucky enough to have been in the right spot.

Thank you for a good day in the field. We saw a few good things; the thrill of that little mouse will be with me for a long time.

Birds:



Red Kite, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Pheasant, Red-legged Partridge, Moorhen, Common Gull, Tawny Owl, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Fieldfare, Redwing, Blackbird, Robin, Goldcrest, Dunnock, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Wren, Pied

Wagtail, Starling, Raven, Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Jay, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer, House Sparrow.

Mammals (signs etc.) (Trevor James/WB):

Fallow Deer, Muntjac, Fox, Badger, Mole, Grey Squirrel, Harvest Mouse, Rabbit.

William Bishop

BENINGTON

Saturday 3rd March 2018

This field meeting was cancelled due to heavy snowfall the night before.

PLASHES WOOD near STANDON

Sunday 18th March 2018



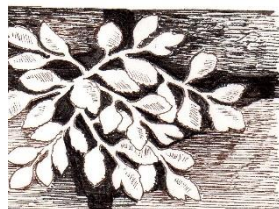
2 members

With some more heavy snow forecast the day before, Kerry Robinson rang me up and said she felt the meeting should be cancelled, as fungi were evidently not going to be much in evidence! Instead, I offered to take the lead, if anyone turned up! In the event Alla Mashanova and I were the only foolhardy ones to arrive. It was cold, with a biting easterly wind, and snow was quite deep in places. Nevertheless, in true BNA style, we stuck to the route: out by way of Standon Lordship meadows, up to Plashes Wood and Hanging Wood, and returning on the other side of the R. Rib via Latchford. Lunch was taken (very rapidly), huddled up in a hollow at the bottom of Hanging Wood!

Despite the weather, it was remarkable how much wildlife was in evidence. We had a good bird list (see below), including Red Kite by Plashes Wood, Kestrel near Standon Lordship, a pair of Buzzards over the Rib Valley, two Grey Partridges in the fields by Plashes Wood, both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, flocks of 40 Redwings and 30 Meadow Pipits in fields by Plashes Wood, Chiffchaff at Standon Lordship, and both Treecreeper and Nuthatch in Plashes Wood, as we might expect. The only bird that should have been there but was not seen or heard was Marsh Tit, along with an absence of House Sparrows and Starlings.

As for mammals and their signs, the snow helped, but we also saw several, including two Muntjac, a Fox and Brown Hare. It was also notable how many flowers were actually out as well, including a nice colony of Sweet Violet *Viola odorata* on the churchyard wall at Standon and Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna* in the churchyard. We also re-recorded the very well-known ferns on the churchyard wall: Rusty-back *Asplenium ceterach*, Wall-rue *A. ruta-muraria* and Hart's-tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium*. The first of these is a rare plant in east Hertfordshire.

In the event, we even recorded at least one fungus: a rotten specimen of *Inonotus hispidus* that had fallen from an Ash tree in Plashes Wood! There was also a fungus, possibly a *Diatrypella*, on Hazel sticks, but I am no expert on these!



Asplenium ruta-muraria

Apr 2012

Birds: Mallard, Red Kite, Buzzard, Kestrel, Pheasant, Grey Partridge, Moorhen, Common Gull, Wood Pigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Fieldfare, Redwing, Song Thrush (including a last year's nest at Plashes Wood), Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, Wren, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer.

Mammals: Muntjac, Fallow Deer (slots), Fox, Brown Hare, Rabbit (droppings/burrows), Mole (frequent hills in Lordship meadows), Grey Squirrel.

Flora (species in flower): *Bellis perennis*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris*, *Cardamine hirsuta*, *Corylus avellana*, *Ficaria verna*, *Galanthus nivalis* (established), *Lamium purpureum*, *Mercurialis perennis*, *Muscari armeniacum* (escape), *Poa annua*, *Prunus cerasifera*, *Prunus spinosa*, *Vinca major* (escape), *Viola odorata*. Ferns at Standon Churchyard: *Asplenium ceterach*, *A. ruta-muraria*, *A. scolopendrium*.

Trevor James

CHISWELL GREEN (southern St Albans)

Saturday 31st March 2018

7 members

We started on a drizzly morning from a small car park at the edge of Greenwood Park. The first sighting was of a dozen Bee Orchid rosettes on a lawn. Surprisingly (or not) these Bee Orchids are best visible in winter, before mowing starts, as they do not have a chance to grow during summer. We moved away from Greenwood Park and followed Ragged Hall Lane towards a small plantation, called Park Wood on some maps. We spotted two slightly different coloured Glory-of-the-snow *Chionodoxa/Scilla forbesii* and paused to look at some trees covered with lichens, but, with wet weather making lichens look not themselves and Paula Shipway not being in seriously recording mode, we went on pretty quickly.

We took a well-hidden (and fenced) path south to cut through the suburban area and then turned into "the rural". A dog walker warned us that the path was very slippery and it was indeed, following heavy rain on the previous day in combination with fresh tractor tracks (the hedge was freshly cut). With

not much on the ground, our attention was on the things higher up. Artichoke and Marble galls, as well as a Jew's ear fungus *Auricularia auricula-judae* were spotted.

We soon reached the headquarters of the Royal Entomological Society and tried to identify a giant ant figure by the entrance. We followed the boundary of the Garden of the Rose, where compost heaps (or something like this) provided some interest – Comfrey (which keyed out as *Symphytum orientale*), a young Caper Spurge *Euphorbia lathyris*, and Wild Pansy *Viola tricolor*) [I would need to be persuaded this is correct, given the rarity of the strict species in Herts. Could have been a hybrid – *T.J.*]. Joe Gray and William Bishop found a micro moth *Agonopterix alstromeriana*, which feeds on Hemlock, which was plentiful on the heaps. We had a chance to observe some intimate relations between Yellowhammers, when a male flew towards two females, tried to mate with one of them and only then started to sing.

We crossed a crop field, where William got excited about many earthworms on the surface, and a mound of tyres covered with mosses and lichens caught Paula's eye. I could recognise *Brachythecium rutabulum* (Rough-stalked Feather-moss) among mosses and Agneta Burton kindly identified later another moss as *Ceratodon purpureus*, which is common in acidic habitats but also occurs in odd places like on old boots.

We admired Sweet Violets *Viola odorata*, both purple and white, on the sides of Noke Lane. It began to rain again as we started our way back across the fields, following a strange bank with a crop field on the lower side and pasture on the upper side. William Bishop spotted a flock of Fieldfares, two Bullfinches and a Kestrel. A Red Kite posed for us sitting on the top of a tree.

We took a different path to Park Wood through a mosaic of woodland and open spaces. The path was extremely well-fenced on both sides with wires and newly planted hedges. Walking around Park Wood we heard two Nuthatches producing rather unusual calls and saw a Squirrel's dining table. We had a chance to compare cones of Scot's Pine and Black Pine (with the edges of the scales of Scot's Pine cones being rhomboid and of Black Pine rounded). I showed Paula one of my favourite trees covered with *Trentepohlia* and *Lepraria incana* and learnt that the spots of a different shade of blue-green (more green) were *Lecanora expallens*. In the

meantime, others (who had already left the wood) enjoyed a view of a Grey Heron flying by.

In a scrubby area out of the wood young trees provided a spectacular mosaic of different lichens on their trunks. One Rowan was particularly beautiful, with *Lecanora chlorotera*, *Lecanora confusa*, *Lecidella elaeochroma*, *Physcia adscendens* and *Xanthoria parietina*. Joe and William showed us a Ramshorn gall (looking like a snail) on an oak and Robin's Pincushion gall on a Dog Rose. Back to the car park, the collection of galls was further extended with galls on Ash and Cleavers, and Paula found *Physcia caesia* growing on a plastic pole.

A few of us went for a short walk around St. Julian's Wood in Greenwood Park and were rewarded with a sight of flowering Wood Anemones.

Birds: (thanks to William): Grey Heron, Red Kite, Buzzard, Kestrel, Pheasant, Wood Pigeon, Ring-necked Parakeet, Skylark, Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Redwing, Blackbird, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Dunnock, Wren, Nuthatch, Starling, Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, House Sparrow. I also heard a Goldcrest. 33 species.

Plants: (in flower): *Anemone nemorosa*, *Arabidopsis thaliana*, *Bellis perennis*, *Buxus sempervirens*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris*, *Cardamine hirsuta*, *Carpinus betulus*, *Cerastium glomeratum*, *Corylus avellana* (female flowers), *Erophila verna*, *Galanthus nivalis*, *Hyacinthus orientalis*, *Lamium purpureum*, *Mahonia aquifolium*, *Mercurialis perennis*, *Muscari armeniacum*, *Myosotis sylvatica*, *Narcissus* agg., *Prunus spinosa*, *Ranunculus ficaria*, *Salix cinerea/caprea*, *Scilla forbesii*, *Senecio vulgaris*, *Stellaria media*, *Symphytum orientale* (to be confirmed), *Taraxacum* agg., *Veronica hederifolia* subsp. *lucorum*, *Veronica persica*, *Vinca major*, *Viola odorata*, *Viola* [tricolor]. 31 species.



Galls (thanks to William and Joe): Artichoke (*Andricus fecundator*), Marble (*A. kollari*) and Ramshorn (*Andricus aries*) galls on oaks, Robin's Pincushion gall (*Diplolepis rosae*), Ash gall (*Aceria fraxinivora*) and *Galium* gall (*Cecidophyes galii*).

Alla Mashonova

CHARLTON

Sunday 15th April 2018

9 members

Before we started our walk, we felt a little despondent, both at the foggy weather and that our recce had not revealed anything of much interest. How wrong we were! In the two weeks since then spring had begun to burst forth and the mist gradually lifted to give us an exciting day.



While nine of us gathered in the car park of the former Windmill Pub, William managed to accumulate a list of 19 birds before we even set off.

Crossing the bridge, the river was lined with Alder and Poplar, the catkins of the poplar in full purple flower. Lesser Celandine covered the bank of the weir. As we made our way up to the pig farm, which keeps rare pigs, including Mangalica and Oxford Sandy Black breeds, the pigs seemed very contentedly enjoying the mud.

Sweet Violet *Viola odorata* fully in flower, emerging Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* and Green Alkanet *Pentaglottis sempivirens* just in flower along the banks of the road were the very welcome first signs of spring. Mole hills romped across a pasture fields beyond the banks. Tiny Whitlow-grass *Erophila verna* was on the driveway at Mill Corner and the Galium Mite Gall (*Cecidophyes rouhollahi*) was spotted on Goosegrass under the hedge. Alla Mashanova helped us with the identification of Hairy Bittercress *Cardamine hirsuta*, showing the seed pods clearly standing above the flower head as the flowers weren't out enough to show the stamens.

At the corner of Charlton Road there is a characterful old flint and brick wall with Stonecrop *Sedum acre* and Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis*. Paula Shipway identified *Lecanora dispersa*, *Lepraria lobificans*, *Verrucaria muralis* and *Diploecia canescens* as some of the lichens there. Two noisy Canada Geese flew over as we had our faces pressed against the wall with lenses! Further along the lane Steve Kiln confirmed the identity of a female Carder Bee *Bombus pascuorum* foraging along the banks, with a tiny Banded Glass-snail (*Vitrinidae*) on Nettle, alongside Garlic Mustard *Alliaria petiolata* and Cuckoo Pint *Arum maculatum*.

In the foggy conditions, we could just make out three Lapwings over the hill fighting with a Buzzard. In the hedgerow the Blackthorn was in blossom woven in with the Elm coming into leaf. Skylarks accompanied us along this stretch of countryside, with their quintessentially English song in the skies above us, while a Peacock butterfly landed momentarily on the track at our feet. The fields to the left of Windmill Lane were a bit of a puzzle. We could not decide whether they were arable, set aside or seeded, but they were awash with Henbit *Lamium amplexicaule* and Red Dead-nettle *L. purpureum*, with a variety of poppies, some Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*, Thyme-leaved Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia* and Field Madder *Sherardia arvensis*. On the mud track there were dozens of new excavations of mining bees, just like a colony of miniature Mole hills. In the distance, as the mist cleared, we spotted two Hares, one of which was very co-operatively grazing, giving us a good prolonged view.

On the north of the path on Windmill Hill meadow, amongst the sheep, William Bishop spotted two Yellow Wagtails feeding on the flies around them, which was a surprising treat. Steve managed to draw a pencil sketch. Another treat was a Corn Bunting singing high up on the hedge. There was a lovely little grass nest full of seeds, exposed in the hedge, probably a Whitethroat's and probably a shelter for a mouse in the winter. Steve found 18 Pied Shield-bugs on the Garlic Mustard and Paula drew our attention to the Black Jelly-lichen *Collema tenax* in the muddy wells on the track.

After lunch a Tortoiseshell Shield-bug hitched a ride on William's coat. We saw the first of dozens of newly emerged Dark-edged Bee-fly *Bombylius major* clinging upside down to the branches of Blackthorn. We stopped to watch a pair of Long-tailed Tits building a new domed nest of lichen, moss and cobwebs in the hedgerow. On the bank of the Beech woodland we came across Common Dog Violet *Viola riviniana*, Spurge Laurel *Daphne laureola* and Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, but, though we knew it was too early to see them, we could not find the Fly Orchids that Trevor James knew about previously, although a Blackcap chivvied us on with its enthusiastic song.

On the corner just before the bridleway to Tatmore Hills Lane there was a swarm of tiny solitary bees on the Blackthorn alongside bee-flies and drone-flies. Further up the track were numerous Harlequin Ladybirds nestling in the curled emerging leaves of Wayfaring Trees, like small jewels. Then coming

down to earth we found ourselves surrounded by a Badger latrine on the edge of the wood, and noticed several Badger footprints in the mud on the pathway. Opposite, up the hill, was a substantial Badger sett. On a grassy bank were Hairy Violets *Viola hirta* and Cowslips *Primula veris*, and a queen bumble bee was seen to fly in and out of a small mammal hole, probably her chamber for this year's eggs.

We made a short detour to look at Maydencroft Manor, one of Henry VIII's hunting lodges, where Paula was excited to find the lichen *Physconia grisea* which she had never before seen producing spores. We then went to look at the Well Head of the River Hiz, with spectacular ancient pollarded oaks, but disappointingly not a drop of water! [Not an uncommon event these days there! In fact it has not had a regular flow now for more than 50 years – T.J.] Returning to Charlton village we were taken by the smell of balsam on the air from the Balsam Poplar or Balm-of-Gilead. William ended the day with a healthy bird list of 40, and we all felt we had thoroughly enjoyed our day in so many different ways.

Birds: Grey Heron, Canada Goose, Mallard, Red Kite, Buzzard, Pheasant, Grey Partridge, Red-legged Partridge, Moorhen, Lapwing, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Green Woodpecker, Skylark, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Dunnock, Wren, Starling, Pied Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer, House Sparrow .

Ruth Graham & Jean Williamson

HUNSDON MEAD

Saturday 28th April 2018

5 Members

This meeting was scheduled to be led by Trevor James but due to ill health then passed to Jack Doyle but ended up coming to me, a couple of days before kick-off.

My heart sank on Saturday morning when I opened the curtains to torrential rain; would I be leading myself? Four hardy folk turned up, on a grey,

miserable damp and cold day. Nothing stops some BNA members. However, things looked awkward when it turned out you cannot buy a car park ticket at Roydon Station; you must ring a number that tells you to send a text then set up an account that takes five minutes. We moved to the village! Shortly before eleven o'clock we set off walking back out of Essex into Herts.

We followed the Navigation path up towards Hunsdon Mead. I had planned a circular walk towards Hunsdonbury but it became obvious this was not really feasible, so we opted to spend our time looking over the meadow. The first thing you notice is the profusion of Cowslips and Bulbous Buttercups over this large meadow. Simon Knott spotted a gravid Dock Beetle, but the day was very cold, and insects were in general scarce, just a few flies and the odd bumblebee were out. Whilst the others looked at the flora (Alla Mashanova was recording onto a sheet for the site), I headed to the further end to try and locate the Green-winged Orchids *Anacamptis morio*. I had rough directions from Trevor and a fifteen-year-old recollection of approximately where they were. I eventually located about 12. They seemed generally rather poor, with several small specimens and only a couple of larger plants. I was joined by the others and after a brief look we moved away to avoid damaging the site. It was nice to see Marsh Marigolds *Caltha palustris* here too, once a common plant of meadows and streams that seems to be disappearing. The other notable plant in the meadow is Pepper-saxifrage *Silene silaus*, pointed out to me by Simon as being in great quantity.

We made our way to the end of the meadow, where Simon picked up a singing Lesser Whitethroat in the hedge by the canal. Everywhere being wet we went to the lock to have lunch, using the gate to put our bags on. We then made our way back down the meadow on the far side along the river. One interesting feature, on the far side, was the garden of Briggens House which contained some fine trees; but the area looked neglected now. There was a particularly large and fine specimen of *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissimum', glorious salmon pink in the spring before the leaves turn green.

We arrived back in the village at 14:45, just before the rain started in earnest. It was good to see the orchids and we achieved a modest bird list, thanks to wetland and farmland birds, but it was probably not the greatest wildlife viewing experience due to the weather.

Much thanks to those who came. I hope you went home to dry out safely and had a warm drink. I headed to Norton Green near Stevenage to look at a Stone Curlew in a field, a bird that always looks sad due to its large eyes, but possibly also on this occasion because of the miserable weather it was experiencing.

Birds: Cormorant, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Gadwall, Mallard, Moorhen, Coot, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Ring-necked Parakeet, Skylark, Swallow, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Starling, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch,.

William Bishop

WESTON HILLS

Sunday 13th May 2018

6 members

It was particularly good to see two of our more recently joined members with the four 'old timers' at this meeting. While waiting for any last-minute arrivals some of us had a hunt along the top of the bank by the car park to see if we could re-find Yellow Bird's-nest *Monotropa hypopitys*, a curious saprophytic plant that lives off decaying matter and was recorded from the area a few years ago. We could not find it [too early in the year – T.J.]. However, we did spot a dozen or more shoots of White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, some of which had buds forming. We paused to check an immature specimen of *Aquilegia* that for a moment we thought could be Greater Celandine. However, the plant had clear sap rather than the yellow sap of Greater Celandine, which confirmed that it was *Aquilegia*. Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, was growing in this heavily shaded area and on the edge of the steps from the car park we found Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea *Lathyrus latifolius*.

In the car park William Bishop showed us the leaves of Herb Bennet *Geum urbanum* that had galls forming. These are caused by a mite, *Cecidophyes nudus*. We noted a probable garden throw-out, Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula*, close to the car park.

We made our way on paths through the wooded area that was devastated by the strong winds of the 1987 and 1990 storms. Sycamores are taking over from the Beech trees that were lost during the storm, but these were being thinned by a working party on the morning of our visit. A few plants were noted as we made our way towards Gibbet Hill. Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*, Wall Lettuce *Mycelis muralis*, Hairy St. John's-wort *Hypericum hirsutum*, Sweet Violet *Viola odorata*, and Hedge Bedstraw *Galium album*.

We moved at a very leisurely pace even for a British Naturalists' Association meeting and after a pause to admire a fine example of a fungus, Dryad's Saddle *Polyporus squamosus*, we spent a long time on the slopes of Gibbet Hill, which is an area of chalk grassland. This is an important habitat and improving due to the recent change in conservation method. The grassland is now being grazed by cattle during the late summer and the chalk flora is thriving. We noted a high number of Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, along with Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, Perforate St. John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum*, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Bulbous Buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, and Hairy Violet *Viola hirsuta*.

One lone and rather odd, looking out of place Spanish Bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispanica* on the slopes started an interesting discussion on the differences between the flower structure of Spring Squill *Scilla verna* and Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. The scientific name for Bluebell has changed a few times during recent decades and interestingly during the 1950s it was known as *Scilla non-scripta*.

During the time we spent on the hill our group spread out and there were reports of a Mole hill towards the bottom of the slope and sightings of the nymphs of the Dark Bush-cricket. Unfortunately for William a Forget-me-not Shield-bug scurried off at speed before he could catch it to show to others in the group. However, we did have an opportunity to see a Green Carpet Moth before it was released. A curious orange swelling on a rose was identified as a rust, *Phragmidium mucronatum* and was one of several examples that we saw during the day.

After a short break to eat our lunch and noting a Kestrel and a Red Kite we moved westwards, taking care not to tread on the numerous Common Twayblade *Neottia ovata* plants growing in the scrubby area next to the grassland. An Ash tree was badly affected by galls that are produced during the life cycle of a mite, *Aceria fraxinivora* and photographs were taken of last year's badly swollen keys.

The morning had been disappointingly cool; however, with an improvement in the temperature, a few insects were starting to appear. Two startlingly colourful Red-and-black Froghoppers *Cercopis vulnerata* were seen, then a Seven-spot Ladybird and two Red-headed Cardinal Beetles. On a cleared area to the west of Gibbet Hill more plants were noted: Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Cowslips *Primula veris*, Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Wild Carrot *Daucus Carota*, Common Vetch *Vicia sativa*, Common Rest-harrow *Ononis repens* and Quaking Grass *Briza media*.

A Kidney-spot Ladybird was resting on the trunk of a young Ash tree and a Latticed Heath Moth was admired before it made its escape. As we continued to explore the open areas, we were not surprised to notice garden escapes, including a honeysuckle pointed out by William and thought to be *Lonicera x italica*. There were two more garden escapes, a *Pyracantha* and growing close-by a showy *Centaurea montana* that has various common names including Perennial Cornflower. Bladder Campion *Silene vulgaris* was also noted in this area.

A shy shield-bug that tried to hide in the centre of a dandelion seed head was identified as a Hairy Shield-bug and as the day warmed up a Brimstone butterfly flew past.

We were pleased to see another BNA member, Kerry Robinson, who did well to find us part way through the meeting and joined us for the rest of the afternoon. With her expertise we were able to add to the growing list for the day: a large Morel Mushroom *Morchella esculenta*, although it was well past its best and Witches' Butter *Tremella mesenterica*, a rust on an Arum leaf, *Puccinia sessilis*, and two more rusts *Plasmopora umbelliferarum* on Cow Parsley and *Taphridium umbelliferarum* on Hogweed. Good eyesight was needed to see the egg of an Orange-tip butterfly on Hedge Garlic.

As we were heading back towards the car park, we spotted a Holly Blue butterfly on the edge of one of the clearings, which is known as a site for Southern Marsh-orchid. Although we had a good hunt round, we could find no sign of it.

Kerry pointed out a final fascinating find for the day on Hawthorn. Occasional leaves had darkened and appeared dead. This is caused by Hawthorn Leaf-blight *Monilinia johnsonii* and sometimes leads to small cup fungi emerging on the fallen berries early the following Spring. Being curious I am sure this is something we will look out for on future meetings.

Paula Shipway

ST. PAULS WALDEN

Saturday 26th May 2018

When my husband, Tim, asked me what I would like to do for my birthday, I said I would like to head out into the countryside for a walk! Fortunately, Paula Shipway had a space for a leader that weekend.

We met at St Pauls Walden church for this walk, which would take us through the meadows, lanes and woodlands of Langley End, Stagenhoe and St Paul's Walden - through flower-rich grasslands and skirting woodlands, where we hoped to find some of the county's interesting flowers.

Shortly after setting off, we noticed a Red Kite soaring above and House Martins nesting in the eaves of a farmhouse just beyond the church. Onwards we walked along field edges and past gardens heading north and found plants of note including Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea* on the banks, Figwort *Scrophularia nodosum* and Charlock *Sinapis arvensis* on the edge of an arable field, along with Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Spotted Medick *Medicago arabica*, Slender Trefoil *Trifolium micranthum* on the edge of the path.

We crossed the B656 and entered Hitch Spring where we found Pignut *Conopodium majus*, Wood Sedge *Carex sylvatica*, Red Campion *Silene dioica*, Sweet Woodruff *Galium odoratum* and the native Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolin* ssp. *montanum*. Leaving Hitch Spring we entered

Hitch Wood Meadow which is a small east-west site sloping down to the B651. I have walked this way many times and there is always something special to note in the grassland. On this occasion we found more Pignut *Conopodium majus*, Bugle *Ajuga reptans*, Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Cowslip *Primula veris*, Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Black Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*, Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*.

We crossed an arable field and then across the pretty lane that leads east to Langley village and headed onwards towards Langley End.

There is a chalk pit near Langley End called Hill End Chalk Pit which is a secluded site of interest for its geology and remnant chalk grassland. Here we found Common Twayblade *Neottia ovata*, Hedge Bedstraw *Galium mollugo*, more Black Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, Dark Mullein *Verbascum nigrum*, Wild Parsnip *Pastinaca sativa*, Wild Marjoram *Oregano vulgare* and Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*.

Our walk crossed the B 656 again and we followed the path inside the northern boundary and down the western edge of Hitch Wood. In this ancient Oak/Hornbeam woodland now with some Beech and Sweet Chestnut plantation we found more native Yellow Archangel, Broad Buckler Fern *Dryopteris dilatata* and some Green Elf-cup *Chlorociboria aeruginascens*.

We enjoyed our lunch quietly on the western edge of the wood in the sunshine before crossing an arable field and skirting Foxholes Wood towards Stagenhoe. Wood Melick *Melica uniflora* was growing along the track side banks - such a pretty grass.

In Chalkleys Wood, Paula found the Oak tree lichen *Chrysothrix candelaris* which is only the 6th record in Hertfordshire. Paula comments: 'A useful record'. Paula also noted *Lecanactis abietina*, another oak tree lichen.

We returned to St Paul's Walden Church and then went back for tea at Rustling End Cottage for the thirsty. Thank you to all those who helped with the identification of birds, insects, lichens and flora.

Birds: Canada Goose, Buzzard, Pheasant, Wood Pigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Swift, Swallow, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Wren, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Chaffinch, Goldfinch.

Mammals: Fallow Deer (3), Muntjac Deer (1), a Badger path.

Insects: Hornet, a solitary bee, White-tailed Bumblebee, Green Tortoise-beetle, Harlequin Ladybird, Soldier Beetle, a click beetle, Red-headed Cardinal Beetle, Red-and-black Frog hopper, Dock bug, Snakefly. Butterflies and Moths: Speckled Wood, Brimstone (male), Orange-tip, a longhorn moth, Burnet Moth sp., Cinnabar Moth, Angle Shades Moth, Common Tubic Moth.

Julie Wise

IVINGHOE HILLS

Saturday 9th June 2018

7 members

We met at Ivinghoe Beacon National Trust car park. There were some concerns about recent vandalism in this car park, but on the day, thanks to a “Walk the Chalk” event, the car park was full of walkers and National Trust people. It was cloudy and cooler than in the previous days, causing concerns whether butterflies and other insects would be active, but the weather improved greatly in the afternoon and we were not disappointed at all!

We followed a hedgerow towards the Beacon and straight away started to pick up Welsh Chafer *Hoplia philanthus*, which Michael Demidecki had already spotted a week earlier in great abundance. As commented by Trevor James, Welsh Chafers (which are not particularly Welsh) only occur occasionally in Hertfordshire, and so we appreciated seeing them everywhere. Velvety-brown Orchid beetles *Dasycera cincta* were also common, joined by a *Grypocoris stysi* and a Red-headed Cardinal Beetle *Pyrochroa serraticornis*. William Bishop pointed out Nettle Galls *Dasineura urticae*, Buckthorn Rust *Puccinia coronata* and big buds on Hazel caused by *Eriophyid* mites. Kentish Snail *Monacha cantiana*, with intricate shell pattern, and a black slug showed up. The hedgerow was clearly favoured by Whitethroats, their songs occasionally interspersed by a song of a Blackcap. Two noteworthy plant species were Sainfoin, and either a Pignut or a Great

Pignut (the plant was too grey and stiff for a Pignut but there were no fruits yet to make an informed decision).

We got to the grassland and things got even better. Orchids were everywhere. Chalk Fragrant-orchid and Common Spotted-orchid were the most common, with occasional sight of a Pyramidal Orchid and a Twayblade, and a few Bee Orchids to William's great satisfaction. Other chalk grassland species included Crested Hair-grass, Kidney Vetch, Milkwort, Fairy Flax, Yellow-rattle, Common Rock-rose, Quaking Grass, Horseshoe Vetch, Spiny Rest-harrow, Wild Thyme, Squinancywort and many more. Gromwell was a rather uncommon sight, as was Ploughman's Spikenard. I paused where I noticed Harebell a year earlier and Andrew Harris immediately found a few leaves hidden in rather dense vegetation. Small Scabious growing right next to a Greater Knapweed provided a wonderful opportunity to notice the differences (e.g. a large end lobe of Small Scabious leaves). We saw a bunch of Rooks with Carrion Crows and Jackdaws in the neighbouring open area, and a bumble-bee with full pollen sacks at a close range. Butterflies and moths were plentiful, the highlights being a strikingly coloured Garden Tiger and finely patterned Yellow Shell and Grass Rivulet. Grass Rivulet is an uncommon species in Hertfordshire (never mind that we were in Buckinghamshire) but its larvae feed on Yellow-rattle, which was plentiful in the area. Among the beetles, starring was a Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn beetle [dreadful name! – T.J.] *Agapanthia villosoviridescens*, and a Swollen-thighed Beetle *Oedemera nobilis* came second. Further galls included a mite *Eriophyes arianus* on a Whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, a midge *Loewiola centareae* causing blister galls on knapweeds, and a thyme gall *Aceria thomasi*. Choke fungus (*Epichloa*) collared completely a grass stem. Field Fleawort caused quite a bit of excitement. We failed to find Butterfly Orchids shown to me the previous year by my 'Identiplant' tutee. Instead we found lots of fruiting Pasque-flowers, presumably planted [No – these are native here – not common though – T.J.]

On our way back, we cut through a strip of woodland and were rewarded with a sight of Red Admiral, Speckled Wood and Large Yellow Underwing (identified by Wendy). A cry of Jay nearly completed the list of corvids leaving just Raven out.

Tea at Paula Shipway's house, with lovely lemon-and-chocolate cake and home-made biscuits, was a wonderful addition to this meeting. Thank you, Paula and David!

Birds: (thanks William): Red Kite, Kestrel, Jackdaw, Jay, Carrion Crow, Rook, Magpie, Wood Pigeon, Swift, Blackbird, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Linnet, Skylark, Wren, Meadow Pipit.

Butterflies and moths (thanks to William for identification): Brown Argus, Small Heath, Small Blue, Common Blue, Brimstone, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Garden Tiger, Mother Shipton, Yellow Shell, Large Yellow Underwing, Chimney Sweeper, Grass Rivulet, Cinnabar Moth.

Plants (selected species): *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (Pyramidal Orchid), *Anthyllis vulneraria* (Kidney Vetch), *Asperula cynanchica* (Squinancywort), *Avenula pratense* (Meadow Oat-grass), *Avenula pubescens* (Downy Oat-grass), *Blackstonia perfoliata* (Yellow-wort), *Briza media* (Quaking Grass), *Bromopsis erecta* (Upright Brome), *Campanula rotundifolia* (Harebell), *Carex flacca* (Glaucous Sedge), *Carlina vulgaris* (Carline Thistle), *Centaurea scabiosa* (Greater Knapweed), *Clinopodium vulgare* (Wild Basil), *Conopodium majus* (Pignut), *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (Common Spotted-orchid), *Festuca ovina* (Sheep's Fescue), *Filipendula ulmaria* (Meadowsweet) [is this right – not *F. vulgaris* (Dropwort)? - T.J.], *Galium verum* (Lady's Bedstraw), *Gymnadenia conopsea* (Chalk Fragrant-orchid), *Helianthemum nummularium* (Common Rock-rose), *Hippocrepis comosa* (Horseshoe Vetch), *Inula conyzae* (Ploughman's Spikenard), *Koeleria macrantha* (Crested Hair-grass), *Lathyrus latifolius* (Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea), *Linum catharticum* (Fairy Flax), *Lithospermum officinale* (Common Gromwell), *Neottia ovata* (Common Twayblade), *Onobrychis viciifolia* (Sainfoin), *Ononis spinosa* (Spiny Rest-harrow), *Ophrys apifera* (Bee Orchid), *Plantago media* (Hoary Plantain), *Polygala vulgaris* (Common Milkwort), *Poterium sanguisorba* (Salad Burnet), *Primula veris* (Cowslip), *Rhamnus cathartica* (Buckthorn), *Rhinanthus minor* (Yellow-rattle), *Scabiosa columbaria* (Small Scabious), *Silene vulgaris* (Bladder Campion), *Tephrosia integrifolia* (Field Fleawort), *Thymus polytrichus* (Wild Thyme), *Viola hirta* (Hairy violet).

Alla Mashanova

KING'S MEADS NATURE RESERVE, WARE

Saturday 23rd June 2018

This was programmed as a joint meeting of BNA and Herts Invertebrate Project members. We met at the Windsor Industrial Estate and made our way onto King's Meads at the top of the Chadwell Bank. Our route took us along the bank to the A10 bridge. Along the way we identified Larch Ladybirds *Aphidecta oblitterata* (beaten off the larch trees) and the weevil *Zacladus geranii* on Meadow Cranesbill.

Beyond the bridge by the path we lifted the old mattress and were rewarded with Great Crested Newts; this has never failed yet! We then spent some time in the wet fen. Common Emerald Damselflies *Lestes sponsa* and Wasp Spiders *Argiope bruennichi* were abundant. Some Long-winged Coneheads *Conocephalus fuscus* were in the reeds. The Common Green Colonel *Oplodonta viridula*, the Fen Snout *Nemotelus pantherinus* and the Barred Snout *Nemotelus uliginosus*, all types of soldierfly, were observed. Water Ladybirds *Anisosticta novemdecimpunctata* were easily beaten from the herbage. Slowly we made our way back across the Meads to re-join the path along the south edge, where we stopped to have lunch. During lunch, a Three-lined Soldierfly *Oxycera trilineata* was observed on a willow leaf. This is a small fly, but it is extraordinarily beautiful with green and black markings (I recommend looking at a picture of one).

After lunch we continued along the path westwards, stopping to watch the tiny yellow-faced bee *Hylaeus signatus* that feeds at Migonette. We meandered into the drier grassland here and saw the Crescent Plume Moth *Marasmarcha lunaedactyla* found on Restharrow. Here Gail Ashton spotted a fly that on examination turned into the find of the day, the Fan-bristled Robberfly *Dysmachus trigonus* – a first for Hertfordshire. Marbled White Butterflies were flying here, elegance in black and white. A few Fairy-ring Longhorns *Pseudovadonia livida* were on flowers mating. This beetle feeds on fungal mycelium in the soil as a larva, unlike most of its relatives that eat dead wood. Going back, we cut across to the New River and followed the path beside it. Alla Mashanova and I found a single Six-row Barley plant here, something new to both of us.

Other interesting finds during the day included:

Bugs: Red-legged or Forest Shieldbug *Pentatoma rufipes*, Bishops' Mitre Shieldbug *Aelia acuminata*, Pinecone Bug *Gastrodes grossipes*. Denticulated Leatherbug *Coriomeris denticulatus*, Potato Capsid Bug *Calocoris norvegicus*.

Spiders: Furrow Orb-web Spider *Larinioides cornutus*, Bordered Orb-weaver *Neoscana adianta*.



Beetles (selected – Trevor James/W.B.): *Calvia quattuordecimpunctata* (Cream-spot Ladybird), *Ceutorhynchus pyrrorhynchus* (a rather local weevil on Hedge Mustard), *Dryophilus pusillus* (a little woodworm that lives on larch trees), *Galeruca tanacetii* (a robust leaf beetle of flowery grassland), *Galerucella sagittariae* (leaf beetle that occurs on swamp plants), *Gymnetron veronicae* (a scarce weevil that creates seed galls on Pink Water-speedwell), *Hoplia philanthus* (Welsh Chafer), *Meligethes carinulatus* (the diminutive pollen beetle that specialises on Bird's-foot-trefoil), *Paederus riparius* (a striking orange and dark blue rove beetle of wetlands), *Perapion violaceum* (seed weevil on Common Sorrel), *Phyllobius virideaeris* (a less common weevil of shrubs and tall herbs), *Pterostichus nigrita* (a ground beetle of damp places, confirmed as this species by dissection, not its relative *P. rhaeticus*), *Rhinocyllus conicus* (a flower-head weevil), *Silis ruficollis* (scarce soldier beetle of fen swamps).

Flies: a conopid fly *Sicus ferrugineus*, a snail-killing fly *Coremacera marginata*

Other insects (with a few extras from T.J.): Meadow Grasshopper *Chorthippus parallelus*, Common Darter dragonfly *Sympetrum striolatum*, Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella*, Large Skipper, Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Marbled White butterflies; Cinnabar Moth, and a larva of a Knot-grass Moth *Acrionicta rumicis*.

Plants of note: Pepper Saxifrage and Small Scabious.

William Bishop

[I left the party early, and on the way back to Chadwell Banks, I met up with the County Dragonfly Recorder, Roy Woodward, who told me he had just seen Hertfordshire's first *Aeshna isosceles* (Norfolk Hawker) on the pools by the banks. We missed that one! T.J.]

BROXBOURNE WOODS NNR

Saturday 7th July 2018

Steve Kiln reports that nobody turned up for this meeting. Apparently, William Bishop did, but never saw Steve! [Confusion over meeting place is suspected!]. Steve found the following species of butterfly: Purple Emperor, Ringlet, Marbled White, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary.

JERSEY FARM WOODLAND PARK

Sunday 22nd July 2018

6 members

On first sight of the parched meadow at Jersey Farm Woodland Park, in which we spent the day, it seemed that insects would be hard to find. However, we enjoyed a variety of finds during the meeting, some unexpected. The meeting was focused on terrestrial Heteroptera, and we found 35 species in all of these (listed below), but we also found many other insects. The highlight was a small hairy ladybird known as *Platynaspis luteorubra*, which is Nationally Notable A. This was determined by Trevor as only the second Herts record since 1900 (the other being at the nearby Coopers Green Pits, in 2015). This is a myrmecophile (living with black ants in the genus *Lasius*).

The group also found Zigzag Elm Sawfly larvae and evidence of their characteristic feeding on the leaves of a planted *Ulmus*



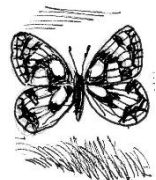
An elm leaf being fed on
by a larva of the Zigzag
Elm Sawfly
Photo: Joe Gray

Bugs (Heteroptera): *Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale*, *Adelphocoris lineolatus*, *Aelia acuminata*, *Anthocoris nemorum*, *Atractotomus parvulus*, *Berytinus crassipes*, *Berytinus minor*, *Cardiastethus fasciiventris*, *Compsidolon salicellum*, *Coriomeris denticulatus*, *Deraeocoris lutescens*, *Dolycoris baccarum*, *Elasmotethus interstinctus*, *Elasmucha grisea*, *Eurygaster testudinaria*, *Gastrodes grossipes*, *Himacerus apterus*, *Himacerus mirmicoides*, *Ischnodemus sabuleti*, *Liocoris tripustulatus*, *Lygocoris pabulinus*, *Megalonotus emarginatus*, *Nabis flavomarginatus*, *Oncotylus viridiflavus*, *Orthotylus prasinus*, *Palomena prasina*, *Pentatoma rufipes*, *Peritrechus geniculatus*, *Phytocoris varipes*, *Piezodorus lituratus*, *Plagiognathus arbustorum*, *Plagiognathus chrysanthemi*, *Pseudoloxops coccineus*, *Stenodema laevigata*, *Stenotus binotatus*

Joe Gray

Coleoptera (Trevor James, with help from William Bishop): *Altica carinthiaca*, *Aphidecta oblitterata* (Larch Ladybird), *Bruchus rufimanus* (Bean Beetle), *Bruchus rufipes*, *Cartodere bifasciata*, *Cassida prasina*, *Coccinella septempunctata* (Seven-spot Ladybird), *Corticicaria gibbosa*, *Cryptocephalus pusillus*, *Cypha longicornis*, *Dorcus parallelepipedus* (Lesser Stag-beetle), *Ernobius mollis*, *Harmonia axyridis* (Harlequin Ladybird), *Hemicrepidius hirtus*, *Hypera nigrirostris*, *Ischnoptera pioni*, *Longitarsus gracilis*, *Mecinus pascuorum*, *Myrrha octodecimguttata* (Eighteen-spot Ladybird), *Neocrepidodera ferruginea*, *Ocypus olens* (Devil's Coach-horse), *Oedemera lurida*, *Oedemera nobilis* (Swollen-thighed Beetle), *Olibrus aeneus*, *Oxystoma cracca*, *Oxystoma pomonae*, *Perapion curtirostre*, *Platynaspis luteorubra*, *Propylea quatuordecimpunctata* (Fourteen-spot Ladybird), *Protapion fulvipes*, *Protapion varipes*, *Pyrrhalta viburni* (Viburnum Beetle), *Rhagonycha fulva* (Common Soldier Beetle), *Rhyzobius litura*, *Sermylassa halensis*, *Sitona lineatus* (Striped Pea-weevil), *Subcoccinella vigintiquatuor punctata* (Twenty-four-spot Ladybird), *Syntomus obscuroguttatus*, *Taeniapion urticarium*, *Tytthaspis sedecimpunctata* (Sixteen-spot Ladybird) (40 species).

Lepidoptera (Trevor James): Peacock, Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Common Blue, Small Skipper; Six-spot Burnet Moth, Cinnabar Moth, Diamond-backed Moth.



Birds (Trevor James): Red Kite, Buzzard, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blackbird, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Wren, Nuthatch, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Goldfinch.

Plants of note (Trevor James): *Anthyllis vulneraria* (Kidney Vetch) (probably sown), *Centaurea debeauxii* (Chalk Knapweed), *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury), *Daucus carota* (Wild Carrot), *Orobanche minor* (Common Broomrape), *Pimpinella saxifraga* (Burnet-saxifrage), *Pulicaria dysenterica* (Common Fleabane), *Rhinanthus minor* (Yellow-rattle) (possibly introduced), *Senecio erucifolius* (Hoary Ragwort), *Vicia cracca* (Tufted Vetch).

MAPLE LODGE & FROGMORE MEADOWS

Saturday 4th August 2018

6 members.

The focus of the day was on invertebrates.

Maple Lodge Nature Reserve is owned by Thames Water and situated in the valley of the River Colne near Rickmansworth. We had made a special arrangement to be shown around the reserve by Martin Parr, the conservation officer. He was able to take us to parts of the reserve away from the main tracks. The highlight was finding the Southern Oak Bush-cricket, a new species for the reserve.

The main insect interest at Frogmore Meadows were the many Common Blue butterflies nectaring on Devils-bit Scabious. We also saw two Silver-washed Fritillaries and it was very exciting to have a good view of several Purple Hairstreaks on a small Oak tree. This was a new record for the reserve.

Jill Saunders

ALDENHAM AND BERRYGROVE WOOD

Sunday 19th August 2018

6 members

I was the first to arrive in Church Lane and was pleased when five members arrived to join me. I noted a couple of Magpies on the Green and then recorded all the lichens I could find on a small Ash branch that was lying on

the ground. There were 12 species including one lichenicolous fungus *Marchandiomyces aurantiacus*. I quelled the suspicion that the branch had been imported and pointed out an Ash tree on the opposite side of the road! I showed members *Hyperphyscia adglutinata* on the trunk of a Horse Chestnut tree and made a note that the tree was very badly affected by the Chestnut leaf miner, *Cameraria ohridella*.

We walked south through the village noting two very common species of lichen, *Lecanora muralis* and *Aspicilia contorta* subsp. *contorta* on the pavement, before turning off to follow the footpath along the southern edge of the golf course. There was some discussion about a Hawthorn that had been planted in the hedge. It had large leaves and was identified as *Crataegus monogyna* x *C. rhipidophylla*. There was a Hawthorn Shieldbug noted from the hedge and a specimen of the lichen *Xanthoria polycarpa* growing on an apple tree twig. Black Horehound *Ballota nigra*, growing under the hedge reminded us that the summer was well advanced.

As we reached the corner of Berrygrove Wood, Knopper galls were spotted on the acorns of an Oak tree overhanging the path and a careful search for lichens on the trunk of a young Oak revealed a lichen curiosity: the 'jam' tart fruiting body of *Xanthoria parietina* growing on the thallus or main body of a *Physcia* species. One possible explanation is that a *Xanthoria* spore has 'adopted' algal cells from the *Physcia* to enable it to start growing.

After reaching the wood, progress was very slow, with concentrated effort to find lichens, beetles and fungi. A fallen oak branch provided a few more lichen records: *Fuscidea lightfootii*, *Punctelia jeckeri* and *Parmotrema perlatum*. Claudi Soler identified a yellow slime-mould, *Fuligo septica*, that has the descriptive common name of Dog-vomit Slime-Mould. There were surprisingly few birds noted, which was partially explained by the noise from the motorway. We reached the pond in the southern part of the wood but found that following the very dry summer there was no water. However, the area was still damp, and we noted Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, White Water-lily *Nymphaea alba*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, and Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*. Unfortunately, there was no sign of *Potamogeton natans* that once grew there [or for that matter *P. polygonifolius*, which also once occurred – T.J.]. We were curious about a liverwort in small circular patches on the mud

and William Bishop, who was using his sweep net, caught several Bishop's Mitre Shieldbugs and a Water Ladybird. Close by Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* was recorded.

I insisted that everyone should come to see a lichen that I had spotted on an earlier exploration of the wood. It was a yellow-green sorediate crust with no fruiting bodies to help with identification and was growing in crevices in the bark of a veteran Oak tree close to the pond. I sent a very small specimen to Mark Powell, who is the regional lichen expert, and he identified it as *Chaenotheca stemonea*. This is the first record for the species in the county.

After lunch sitting close to the pond (and the motorway!) we followed a footpath north before joining the track on the west side of the wood. I made a note of two Speckled Wood butterflies and Chicory *Cichorium intybus* that was growing by the track. The day had passed very quickly and it was time to head for home so we took a short cut back towards the village and our cars. We all enjoyed the slow pace of the day and the opportunity to have a thorough search.

I have included a list of the lichens and lichenicolous fungi (indicated as LF) that I recorded during the day along with records that I made during my earlier exploration of the area.

Amandinea punctata, *Anisomeridium polypori*, *Arthonia punctiformis*, *Arthonia radiata*, *Arthonia spadicea*, *Arthopyrenia punctiformis*, *Aspicila contorta* subsp. *contorta*, *Candelaria concolor*, *Candelariella reflexa*, *Chaenotheca ferruginea*, *Chaenotheca stemonea*, *Dimerella pineti*, *Diploicia canescens*, *Flavoparmelia caperata*, *Flavoparmelia soredians*, *Fuscidea lightfootii*, *Graphis scripta*, *Hyperphyscia adglutinata*, *Hypotrachyna revoluta*, *Lecania naegeli*, *Lecanora carpinea*, *Lecanora chlorotera*, *L. confusa*, *L. expallens*, *L. hagenii*, *L. muralis*, *L. elaeochroma*, *Lepraria incana*, *Lepraria lobificans*, *Marchandiomyces aurantiacus* LF, *Melanohalea elegantula*, *Parmelia sulcata*, *Parmotrema perlatum*, *Phaeophyscia orbicularis*, *Phylloblastia fortuita*, *Physcia adscendens*, *P. tenella*, *Physconia grisea*, *Porina aenea*, *Punctelia jeckeri*, *Punctelia subrudecta*, *Ramalina fastigiata*, *Scoliciosporum chlorococcum*, *Strigula taylorii*, *Taeniolella phaeophysciae* LF, *Unguiculariopsis thallophila* LF, *Xanthoria parietina*, *X. polycarpa*.

Trevor James's best beetle record for the day (found by William) was the diminutive detritus beetle *Atomaria mesomela*, which he has only seen a couple of times before. (The only other recent Hertfordshire specimen was also found by William at King's Meads.). Also, another of the beetles at the pond was the scarce wetland ground beetle *Agonum viduum*. [I have not included a complete list, for lack of space – T.J.]

William kindly passed on his list of birds for the day, with a few extra from Trevor, along with a few shield-bugs and galls.

Birds: Buzzard, Black-headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Treecreeper, Carrion Crow, Magpie.

Shield-bugs: Common Green, Hawthorn, Bishop's Mitre, Forest Bug, Juniper, Dock Bug.

Galls: Knopper Gall and Marble Gall on Oak, *Acalitus stenaspis* on Beech leaves.



Fungi (with thanks to Claudi Soler): Ascomycetes – a woodwart *Annulohypoxylon minutellum*, Birch Woodward *Annulohypoxylon multiforme*, Hazel Woodward *Hypoxylon fuscum*. Basidiomycetes – Deer Shield *Pluteus cervinus*, Russet Toughshank *Gymnopus (Collybia) dryophilus*, Chicken-of-the Woods *Laetiporus sulphureus*, Collared Parachute *Marasmius rotula*, Giant Polypore *Meripilus giganteus*, Birch Polypore *Piptoporus betulinus*, Pale Brittlestem *Psathyrella candolleana*, Split Porecrust *Schizopora paradoxa*.

Myxomycetes: *Mucilago crustacea*, *Fuligo septica*, *Lycogala* sp.

Postscript

Some weeks after this meeting, the Hertfordshire Bryophyte Recorder, Agneta Burton, looked at photographs of the curious liverwort in the pond area and considers that it is very likely to be *Riccia fluitans*, although she would need to see a specimen in order to be certain.

William found a flea in a disused bird's nest during the meeting, now identified as a vole flea, *Megabothris turbidus*. Perhaps this is the first Herts BNA meeting flea!

Paula Shipway



Plant hunting on the downs near Ivinghoe

9th June 2018

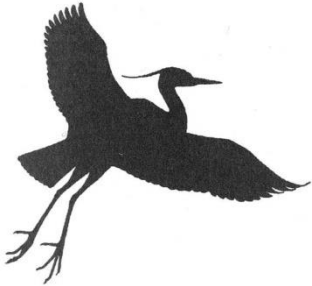
(Photo: Paula Shipway)



Looking for bark beetles at Aldenham

19th August 2018

(Photo: Paula Shipway)



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