

## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 4/2/24.

Although not as warm as the Scottish Highlands, where a new UK temperature record for January was set (19.6C at Kinlochewe!), it was sufficiently spring-like for Lesser Celandines to flower, and Red Admirals to emerge from hibernation.

Along with a general rise in insect activity, the list of moths increased this week, with firsts of the season for Small Brindled Beauty, Dotted Border, March Moth and Oak Beauty – the latter surely the first really glamorous species of the moth year. The *Acleris umbrana* reported last week had its identity confirmed by an expert, which made it the first confirmed record of this species in Surrey – although there was an unconfirmed one in the same garden in 2023. An attractive micromoth belonging to the same genus was a form that, without microscopic examination, could be one of two species, and it is recorded as *A. ferrugana/notana*.

It was quite a lively week for birds. The 9 Woodlark seen in Woolmer Forest this week included a remarkable 7 singing males. Observers in Sussex and Hampshire have opined that Pintail ducks are having a good season, and two were unusual visitors to Woolmer Pond. The Bordon area produced Crossbills and large flocks of Siskin. Crossbills, along with Bramblings (not frequent this season) were also reported from Crooksbury Common. Redwings were seen in a local garden. Jack Snipe at Shalford Meadows was an interesting report, and the Waxwings at Farnham were apparently still in the town, but at a different address: the garden of the library!

A clear-out of a garden pool revealed two newts that belonged to two different species: the Common (or Smooth) Newt is the typical resident of garden ponds in the south-east of England, but the other was a Palmate Newt, which is less common here but is the dominant species in peaty ponds in uplands of the west and north. The Palmate Newt can be distinguished by its webbed hind feet.

(These observations and photos have been compiled principally from postings by Haslemere Natural History Society members to the Members' Facebook group).

Photos: Palmate Newt (by M. Tomsett); Common Newt (by M. Tomsett); Red Admiral (by M. Tomsett); the leafhopper *Zygina* sp. (by A. Swan); Lesser Celandine (by A. Swan); March Moth (by A. Swan); Oak Beauty moth (by M. Tomsett); the micromoth *Tortricodes alternella* (by M. Tomsett); the micromoth *Acleris ferrugana/notana* (by A. Swan).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 11/2/24.

14 species of moth were recorded from a garden light trap in one night this week – a remarkable total for February. Possibly the highlight was the uncommon and delicately marked micro-moth *Acleris logiana*. The Small Brindled Beauty turned up again: it seems that our area is a stronghold for this species. It has declined dramatically in the last ten years in places where it was previously common, such as the New Forest.

Bumblebees have been busy during sunny spells. A Buff-tailed Bumblebee was noticed to be carrying a cluster of mites. These may appear to be parasites, but they don't normally do significant harm to the bees, as the mites are merely hitching a lift to other sites where they feed on debris in bee nests. This is known as a phoretic relationship, and is only a problem for the bees if the load of mites becomes so heavy that they can't fly.

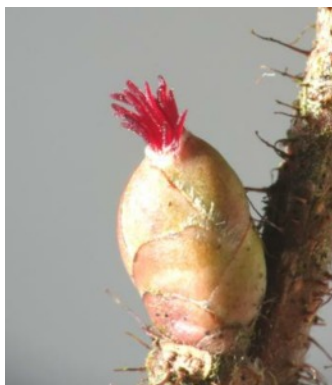
After the first Hazel catkins (which bear the male flowers) opened several weeks ago, we have been looking for the female flowers, which consist of just a cluster of stigmas emerging from a swollen bud. They only appeared this week, and in several places simultaneously. This disparity of timings seems to happen every year but is a puzzle: perhaps the catkins don't mature (i.e. release pollen) as soon as they open. The swarms of long and perfectly vertical catkins are currently a striking feature of roadsides and hedgerows.

The outstanding bird report this week was a Red-crested Pochard at Frensham, where the usual more modestly coloured Pochard was also present in small numbers. Crossbills and large flocks of Lesser Redpolls were again seen in Woolmer Forest. Redwings and Sparrowhawks were the more unusual birds seen in local gardens. The Farnham Waxwing flock continued to visit the garden of the library, where one of our observers saw them feeding on Mistletoe berries – clearly one of their favourite fruits.

Night-time road users should be aware of the plight of Common Toads, which migrate to breeding sites in ponds and lakes at this time of year, often in large numbers, oblivious to hazards such as road traffic.

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Photos: Buff-tailed Bumblebee with phoretic mites (in "shoulder" area) (by M. Tomsett); female Hazel flower (by A. Swan); Grey Shoulder-knot moth (by M. Tomsett); Pochard (by A. Swan); the micro-moth *Acleris logiana* (by M. Tomsett); Hebrew Character moth (by M. Tomsett); Small Brindled Beauty moth (by A. Swan).





## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 18/2/24.

The first mating frogs were noted on Valentine's Day, and garden ponds are now filling with spawn. Despite the mild season, this is not happening particularly early, compared with recent years. Blackthorn blossom is now showing: it is most conspicuous in the chalk country, where this shrub is abundant. The streamsides of the Wey and its tributaries are becoming dappled with the green/gold of Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage, the flowers of which are arranged with a peculiar rectangular symmetry.

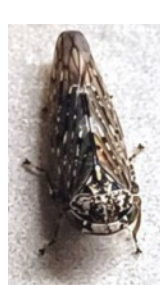
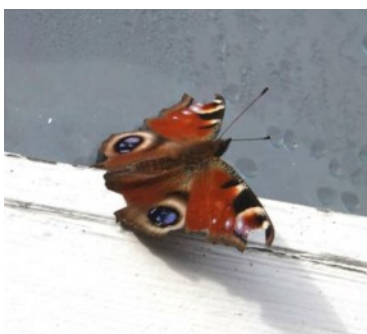
On a sunny day in mid-week, Brimstone butterflies were suddenly noticed almost everywhere. It may seem that they have just "hatched out", but in fact they have just aroused from hibernation, a favoured site for which is amongst Ivy in woodland. They have just one generation a year: adults emerge from chrysalises in high summer and live for almost a full 12 months. Peacock butterflies were also seen this week. It is curious that Peacocks coming out of hibernation in the early spring usually look tatty, whilst Brimstones that have spent the winter in the same mode look pristine.

Although not in our area, very early incoming spring migrant birds have been reported: Barn Swallows and Sedge Warblers - including one in Surrey. An unusual mixed flock that included Yellowhammers, Reed Buntings and Lesser Redpolls was seen in Woolmer Forest; this site also had a flock of 35 Meadow Pipits. The best bird report was perhaps a Short-eared Owl at Thursley Common. Special garden sightings included a Blackcap (which may have over-wintered here) and a Raven – a normally shy species that may be becoming bolder around houses. The Waxwings in Farnham were again reported from the garden of the town library, but later in the week they had moved to the University of Creative Arts, and then the car park of Waitrose!

The prodigious season for moths continued, with an astonishing 243 counted in one light trap, mostly Common Quakers. Less common species included Horse Chestnut, Pine Beauty and Yellow-horned. An unusual leafhopper bug was found: *Acericerus heydenii* is a relatively new arrival to the UK. Many leafhoppers have arrived here from various parts of the world with imported plants, but this one seems to have migrated from central Europe as the climate has warmed. It appears to be the first record of this species in our area. A huge Southern Wood Ant nest was found in local woodland. These constructions are usually made of conifer debris and may house hundreds of thousands of ants.

(These observations and photos have been compiled principally from postings by Haslemere Natural History Society members to the Members' Facebook group).

Photos: Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage (by A. Swan); Peacock butterfly (by A. Swan); the leafhopper bug *Acericerus heydenii* (by M. Tomsett); Yellow-horned moth (by A. Swan); contents of a light trap - Common Quaker moths (by M. Tomsett); Marmalade Hoverfly (by M. Tomsett); Jelly Ear Fungus (by A. Swan); Southern Wood Ant nest (by M. Tomsett).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 25/2/24.

At the beginning of the week many birds were seen carrying nesting material, but by the end of the week cold conditions swept in, and their attentions returned to food – garden feeders were very busy. Bank Voles and Wood Mice were seen tidying up crumbs that the birds dropped. Bank Voles are more likely to be found in gardens than Field Voles, which prefer more open habitats.

Bird reports were sparse this week, probably due to the difficult conditions. A Woodcock was seen at Woolmer Pond – this is a crepuscular species that is difficult to find unless favoured locations are visited at dawn or dusk. The most surprising report was a Black Swan near Fernhurst; this species is of course not native to the UK (it is from Australia) but it is widely kept in ornamental waterfowl collections and sometimes escapes. It is occasionally seen on estuaries and lakes along the south coast and may even breed here (it is known to breed regularly in East Anglia).

In one house several longhorn beetles identified as *Phymatodes testaceus* appeared indoors: these are recognised by their broad femurs. Their larvae feed on dead wood, and they no doubt came into the house as larvae in logs. A Minotaur Beetle made a nocturnal appearance – these have become regular occurrences through the winter.

The flowering of Primroses and Blackthorn blossom developed slowly, and Common Dog Violets made their first appearance. In damp weather before the new season's leaves unfurl, the extraordinary arborescent growths of lichens on tree branches are at their most exuberant: these repay closer inspection. The ink-cap relative *Coprinellus micaceus* was found; this fungus that can emerge at any time of the year when it is wet enough, as it was this week.

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Photos: Bank Vole (by A. Swan); the longhorn beetle *Phymatodes testaceus* (by A. Swan); Minotaur Beetle (female) (by M. Tomsett); lichens on branch - species of *Ramalina*, *Parmelia* and *Usnea* (by V. McClure); *Coprinellus micaceus* "Glistening Ink-cap" (by M. Tomsett).

