

## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 7/4/24.

A wave of spring migrant birds moved towards us this week, with Blackcaps becoming common and small numbers of Whitethroats and Redstarts in several places. There have been many sightings of Ring Ouzels across southern counties, including at Pewley Down (Guildford); they are here just fleetingly on their way to upland areas in the north. Now should be a good time to look for these on Black Down, a regular spring site for these super birds. Nightingales and Swallows are approaching, but with no local reports yet. Using a mobile phone app for birdsong identification ("Merlin"), a Grasshopper Warbler was detected on one of our heaths - quite a rarity here. Waxwings are still lingering, there was a small flock reported on Hankley Common.

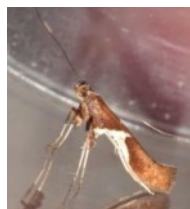
The Society's visit to Bracklesham (Selsey) was timed to take advantage of an exceptionally low tide, in the hope that this would expose the rich 46 million-year-old fossil beds on the foreshore. Onshore winds and an accumulation of beach sand reduced the potential on the day, but several fossil shark teeth, some eagle ray teeth and an assortment of shelly fossils were found loose on the beach. Among them were penny-sized discs with an internal structure arranged as a tightly-coiled spiral – these were nummulites, an extinct type of foraminiferan, and extraordinarily large considering that it was single-celled!

Reptile surveys were successful in finding Adders and Common Lizards on our local heaths, plus a spherical papery structure that turned out to be the egg case of a Wasp Spider: possibly our most glamorous arachnid.

The names of moths can be misleading, for example the Scarce Footman has in recent years often been more numerous than the Common Footman. However, the Scarce Prominent is genuinely rare, but this species was recorded in three local sites this week, along with the impressive but commoner Great Prominent. Interesting micromoths included *Caloptilia stigmatella* and the purple-spangled *Dyseriocrania subpurpurella*.

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

Photos: Common Lizard (by V. Carter), Adders (by V. Carter); fossils from Bracklesham (by C. Lemka); egg case of Wasp Spider (by V. Carter); Scarce Prominent moth (by M. Tomsett); the micromoth *Caloptilia stigmatella* (by A. Swan); Great Prominent moth (by M. Tomsett); the micromoth *Dyseriocrania subpurpurella*, plus close-up of purple scales (by A. Swan).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 14/4/24.

Just a few days of consistent fine weather was enough for an eruption of activity. The first sighting of Orange-tip butterflies is always a significant event, as this is the first of our spring butterflies to emerge as fresh adults: the Brimstones, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells and Commas that we've seen earlier had been hibernating and could appear on any mild day through the winter.

The most spectacular bird reports were an Osprey reported fishing at Frensham – but only briefly – and a Hoopoe in a private garden in Elstead. Much easier to observe were the significant arrivals of spring migrants: the first Reed Warblers and Swallows were seen, and Willow Warblers joined the increased numbers of Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps. Cuckoos were reported at Rake and Thursley Common and Nightingales at Pulborough Brooks. A Grasshopper Warbler was also reported at Thursley. Intriguingly, a puzzling sound heard on several evenings from a garden just to the east of the town was identified by a mobile phone app as a Short-eared Owl: very unusual in this location and habitat.

The warm weather produced huge numbers and variety of bees. Joining the bumblebees and honeybees were a confusing set of smaller dark brown furry species, and a number of more brightly coloured nomad bees, which have abdomens patterned similar to some hoverflies. Gooden's Nomad Bee was identified, and possibly also the rarer Lathbury's Nomad Bee. Nomad bees lay eggs in the nest burrows of other bees, where their larvae feed on the provisions intended for the larvae of the host. Beetles were frequent, including the blue-black Alder Leaf Beetles (in large numbers), the longhorn *Rhagium mordax* and the uncommon *Scaphidium quadrimaculatum*, one of the "shining fungus beetles", whose larvae feed on bracket fungi. The first adult damselflies of the year were observed climbing out of a pond. There were a couple of good nights for moths, with some species giving the feel of early summer! In particular, there was a very early Orange Footman: possibly the earliest ever record of this species in the county.

A reptile survey on a local heath produced 2 Adders, 7 Common Lizards, a Grass Snake and an amazing 26 Slow Worms! Also noticed on the heath were patches of the low-lying semi-parasitic plant Lousewort. Bluebells are flowering in our woods, and now is a good time to look for sedges, many of which flower before grasses and the yellow stamens on their inflorescences are currently relatively conspicuous.

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Photos: Orange-tip butterfly (by A. Swan); Orange-tip butterfly pair mating (by A. Swan); the longhorn beetle *Rhagium mordax* (by A. Swan); Lobster Moth (by M. Tomsett); Slow Worm (by V. Carter); Blackcap (by A. Swan); Orange Footman moth (by A. Swan); the beetle *Scaphidium quadrimaculatum* (by A. Swan); Brimstone moth (by M. Tomsett); Lousewort (by V. Carter); Scorched Carpet moth (by A. Swan); Gooden's Nomad Bee (by A. Swan); Swallow Prominent moth (by M. Tomsett); Spring Sedge (by A. Swan).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 21/4/24.

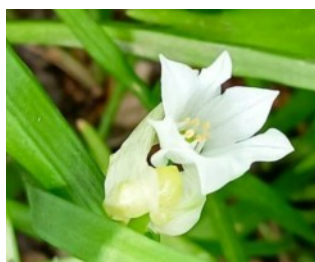
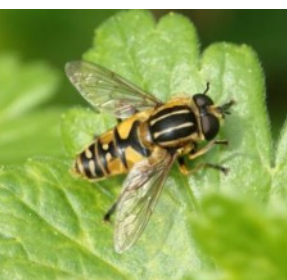
One of the first birds heard during the Society's visit to Lavington Common was a Nightingale, but, despite patient attendance, it stubbornly refused either to appear or to give a proper rendition of its famous song! Early in the season the males sing at night to attract the attention of incoming females; later in the season they sing more during daylight hours to establish their territories. Chiddingfold Forest is possibly the best place to hear them. Also seen were Woodlarks, Linnets (all in pairs) and Dartford Warblers. Woolmer Pond produced some good reports, including a Cuckoo, Redstarts and the first local Garden Warbler of the season, but the most exciting report came right at the end of the week: a Hen Harrier at Thursley Common. Willow Warblers became more widespread. A Brambling at Hindhead was a surprise, as these winter visitors have been scarce all season, and they should be moving on now.

Despite the cold northerly wind, the first Small Copper of the season was seen at Lavington, but it was a poor week for insects, with common species such as the bluebottle *Calliphora vicina* and the hoverfly *Helophilus pendulus* attracting more attention than they would if there had been other species around! A Marsham's Nomad Bee was among the bees braving the chilly air, and the few moths included Angle Shades, Muslin Moth and Flame Shoulder – the last of these is one we associate with summer!

Woodland flowers included the strange Wood Spurge, which has its puzzling floral parts laid out on yellow-green saucers, and Wild Garlic (or Ransoms), which is now at its peak. The other common member of the onion family flowering now is the Few-flowered Garlic, which is abundant on some roadsides. It spreads readily not so much from seed but by means of bulbils that form in the flower head, replacing some of the flowers and propagating the plant asexually. In the case of Crow Garlic, common on grassy verges later in the season, bulbils usually replace flowers completely.

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Photos: Small Copper butterfly (by A. Swan); Wood Spurge (by M. Tomsett); Flame Shoulder moth (by M. Tomsett); Angle Shades moth (by M. Tomsett); *Calliphora vicina* (by J. Godden); Marsham's Nomad Bee (by A. Swan); Woodlark (by A. Swan); Wild Garlic (by M. Tomsett); the hoverfly *Helophilus pendulus* (by A. Swan); Muslin Moth (by M. Tomsett); Few-flowered Garlic (by M. Tomsett).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 28/4/24.

A visit to a botanically-rich marsh in the west of our area revealed many plants of the uncommon Marsh Valerian and fresh, frail-looking fronds of the rare Marsh Fern, in probably its only local site. Conservation efforts to clear scrub so as to favour the special fen vegetation appear to be working. Also found was the extraordinary “Eyelash Cup” fungus *Scutellinia scutellata*.

Early Purple Orchids are now in full flower in the woods to the south and east of the town. Two species of non-native plant were also noticed this week: the Dusky Cranesbill (*Geranium phaeum*) – a rare garden escape, and *Claytonia perfoliata* (which has several English names, including the generous “Springbeauty”). The latter has a bizarre appearance, as opposite leaves on the stem merge to form a disc from which the inflorescence emerges - a configuration known as “perfoliate”.

Warblers were very vociferous despite the cold winds: songs of Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, Whitethroats, Blackcaps and the less common Garden Warblers were all distinguished at one spot on a local common. Reed Warblers were in good numbers in reed beds, though remaining well hidden. The outstanding bird reports were a little further afield: a Slavonian Grebe at Tice’s Meadow (Farnham) and a Little Crake at Papercourt Meadows (south of Woking) - the first in Surrey since 1860! This secretive species winters in east Africa and breeds in eastern Europe, so how it came to be in Surrey during a phase of northerly winds is a mystery.

A Speckled Wood butterfly ventured out during a sunny spell and was the first of the season for one observer, but conditions remained poor for insects: the worst April for moths in memory, according to one experienced lepidopterist!

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Photos: The “Eyelash Cup” *Scutellinia scutellata* (by A. Swan); Speckled Wood butterfly (by A. Swan); Marsh Valerian (by A. Swan); Early Purple Orchids (by M. Tomsett); Dusky Cranesbill (by M. Tomsett); *Claytonia perfoliata*, plus close-up (by A. Swan); the lichen *Cladonia digitata* (by M. Tomsett); Roe Deer (by A. Swan); Marsh Fern (by A. Swan).

