

## Wildlife News

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

A positive consequence of the cool, damp weather is the freshness of our heathland vegetation, which has looked dry and faded in most recent years. The Bell Heather is just beginning to add colour to the heaths, and the Common Centaury is looking particularly good. On some commons there are striking yellow patches of the non-native Dotted Loosestrife, which is close to becoming too invasive.

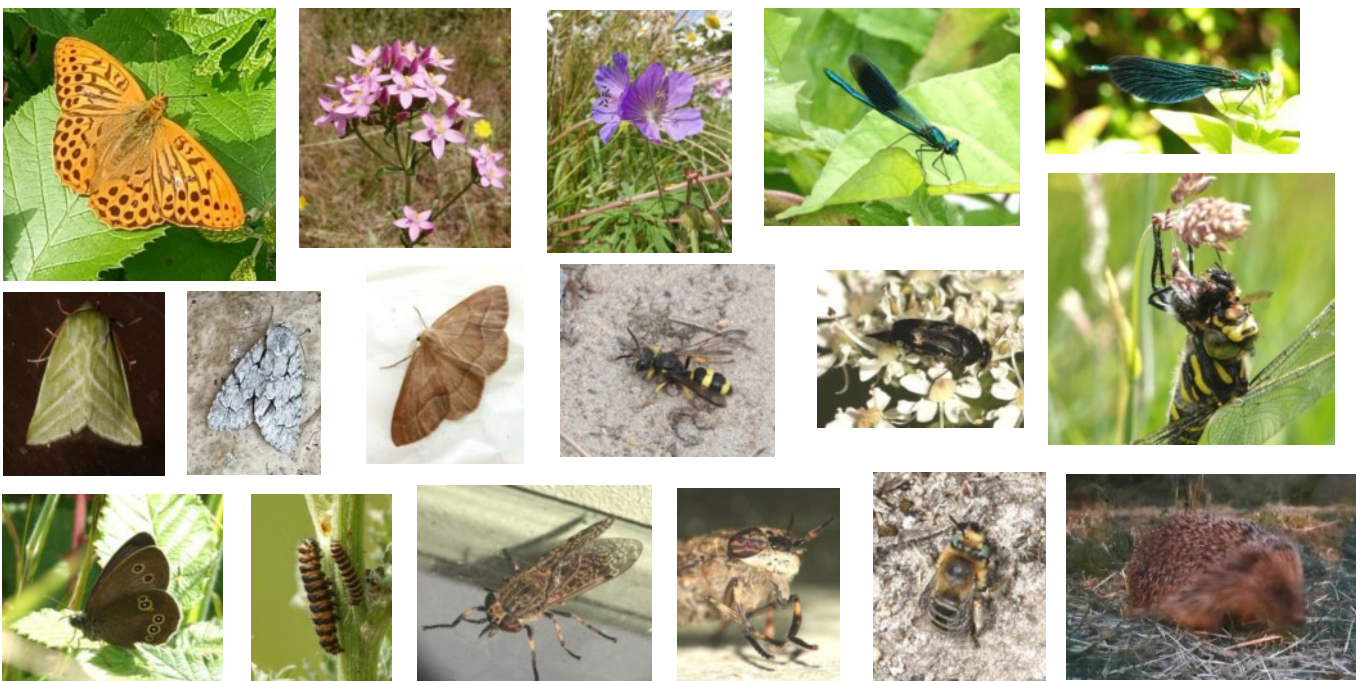
The Society visited a private nature reserve near Duncton, where a field is being transformed into a wildflower meadow to enhance the existing landscape of ponds and woodlands around a fast-flowing chalk stream. The Banded Demoiselle was resting on pond-side vegetation, waiting for the sun, and the difference from the Beautiful Demoiselle, more typical of the Haslemere area, could be seen. Hogweed is now flowering, and is always worth checking for the insects it attracts, which included at this site the “tumbling flower beetle” *Variimorda villosa*, which has “Nationally Scarce” status, although it seems quite frequent locally. When disturbed, these beetles evade potential predation using the manoeuvre suggested by their name.

Silver-washed Fritillaries and Ringlets became numerous in favoured sites when the weather permitted, and Purple Hairstreaks have been seen. It was a poor week for moths, with the Grey Dagger, Green Silver-lines and the uncommon Barred Red being perhaps the highlights. Ragworts became infested with Cinnabar Moth caterpillars, which was not a surprise, considering how common the adult moths have been this year. Other interesting insects this week were a Golden-ringed Dragonfly observed catching and eating a cuckoo bee and, on bare sand on heaths, the digger wasp *Cerceris rybyensis* and Green-eyed Flower Bees. Horseflies have larvae that breed in damp conditions, and they seem to be doing well this year. It is a pity that the notorious cleg (*Haematopa pluvialis*) is so keen on human blood: it is quite an attractive insect!

We should hope that the damp weather has helped Hedgehogs find snails and other invertebrate prey: five were counted on a garden lawn to the south-west of the town. Bird reports were again modest, but it was interesting that a Cattle Egret was reported at Tice’s Meadow, Farnham. These birds are typically denizens of warm-climate zones. They have been increasing in the Chichester/Selsey area in recent years and, as they are now to the north of us, they should be looked out for in our area - they are usually seen in fields with livestock.

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

Photos (by A. Swan except where indicated): Silver-washed Fritillary (by M. Tomsett); Common Centaury; Meadow Cranesbill; Banded Demoiselle; Beautiful Demoiselle; Green Silver-lines moth; Grey Dagger moth (by M. Tomsett); Barred Red moth (by M. Tomsett); the digger wasp *Cerceris rybyensis*; the beetle *Variimorda villosa*; Golden-ringed Dragonfly eating a cuckoo bee; Ringlet; Cinnabar Moth caterpillars; cleg, plus close-up of head with biting mouthparts; Green-eyed Flower Bee; Hedgehog (by V. Carter).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 14/7/24.

A Nightjar was photographed on a heath in the west of our area: a rare opportunity, and the first the photographer has had in many years of monitoring heathland birds. Reports suggest that Nightjars are quite numerous this year, but also that their prey (larger moths and beetles) are down in numbers, so we fear for their breeding success – the nestlings will suffer if the food supply is inadequate. Other notable reports were a Honey Buzzard over Midhurst and Woolbeding, and a “dog-fight” involving a Hobby and about 40 Swifts over Haslemere! In a greenhouse left open, Great Tit nestlings fledged from a nest in a flower pot protected by a “lid” with just a thin gap for access. This shows how availability of nesting sites is a limiting factor for birds.

In another week of mostly cool and wet conditions, butterflies have been sparse, but there were a couple of observations of Purple Hairstreaks at ground level. This is unusual for this species: it is normally seen in small groups fluttering around the tops of tall oaks in the evening. There were some scattered reports of Purple Emperors, but not many. Moths were modest in abundance and diversity, but there were some interesting species, particularly a Light Crimson Underwing, a previously very rare species which seems to have spread rapidly in the last couple of years. There were a few uncommon micro-moths, including the attractive *Aethes rubigana* and the seldom-seen *Dichomeris alacella*. There were many observations of Southern Hawker dragonflies emerging this week. Other interesting insects included a Dusky Cockroach – there are three native UK species of cockroach, all of which are uncommon and are not pests (the domestic pest cockroaches are all non-native).

Flowers that contribute to the feeling of high summer became conspicuous this week: the untidy but bright Goldenrod on heaths, the pale green Wood Sage in heathy woods, various species of St. John’s Wort on commons, and the delightful Meadowsweet on wet meadows and streamsides. They all seem to be benefitting from the damp conditions. Two types of gall were noticed on wild roses: the “robin’s pincushion” and a small red “pea gall”. Both of these are caused by different species of tiny gall wasps of the genus *Diplolepis*: the adults lay eggs in the host plant plus chemicals that induce the plant to produce the gall, which protects and nourishes the developing larvae.

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Photos: Nightjar (by M. Lawn); Purple Hairstreak x 2 (by M. Tomsett); Great Tit nest in flowerpot (by I. Howard-Duff); Light Crimson Underwing (by M. Tomsett); Yellow-tail moth (by A. Swan); detail of Elephant Hawkmoth (by A. Swan); Dusky Cockroach (by A. Swan); the micromoth *Dichomeris alacella* (by A. Swan); the micromoth *Eudemis profundana* (by A. Swan); the micromoth *Aethes rubigana* (by M. Tomsett); Black-tailed Skimmer (by M. Tomsett); red pea gall (by M. Tomsett); “robin’s pincushion” gall (by M. Tomsett); Wood Sage (by A. Swan); Meadowsweet (by A. Swan); Goldenrod (by V. McClure).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 21/7/24.

The mating performance of damselflies is an intriguing spectacle. The male uses appendages on the tip of his abdomen to clasp onto the neck of a female, and the female then curves her abdomen under the male to make contact with a package of sperm that the male has placed towards the front of his abdomen. The male, though, does not release the female when this is done: the pair fly attached together (“in tandem”) whilst the female carefully places fertilised eggs in water. The value of this to the male is that he can ensure that the female does not mate with other males before the eggs are laid. Common Blue Damselflies were observed doing these balletic manoeuvres this week.

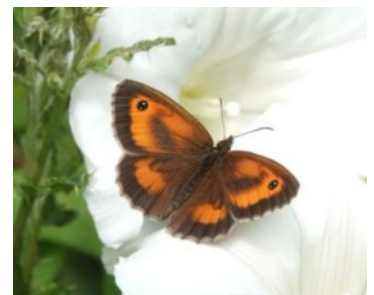
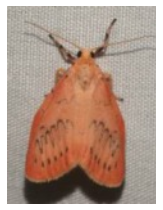
Butterfly Conservation’s “Big Butterfly Count” has started; it continues until Aug 4th. It is still the case that observers reckon that most species are down this year, although a few are doing quite well: Ringlets, for example. Gatekeepers appeared in reasonable numbers this week, as did Graylings on the heaths to the north of us (they are virtually absent from West Sussex heaths, inexplicably). Other interesting insects this week were a Red Longhorn Beetle (rare, according to the books, but occurs quite often in our area) and some impressive biting insects: deerflies and horseflies. Moths were quite disappointing, despite a couple nights with very promising conditions; highlights included the uncommon Blue-bordered Carpet and, seen in two places, the Shaded Broad-bar – a “species of conservation concern” due to a decline in abundance over the last few decades.

A Broad-leaved Helleborine orchid in a garden flowered for the first time in ten years, but this seems to be an exception: it has been difficult to find flowers of this species in local woods where it is usually quite common. They prefer damp seasons, so this is a puzzle.

Common and Green Sandpipers have been reported on several of our larger lakes. Late in the week, a pair of Whimbrels were reported flying over Frensham Little Pond. We are now approaching the time of year when some migrant species are returning south.

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Photos: Damselflies egg laying “in tandem” (by J Godden); Broad-leaved Helleborine (by A. Swan); Blue-bordered Carpet moth (by A. Swan); Red Longhorn Beetle (male – only the females are red) (by A. Swan); Coronet moth (by M. Tomsett); Shaded Broad-bar moth (by M. Tomsett); Rosy Footman moth (by A. Swan); Splayed Deerfly (by A. Swan); horsefly, possibly *Hybomitra distinguenda* (by A. Swan); September Thorn moth (by M. Tomsett); Gatekeeper (by A. Swan).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 28/7/24.

Late in the week, starting on Friday, there was a sudden surge of reports of uncommon waders and other sea birds around the UK coast: this must largely be the result of birds straying during the beginning of the migration season. There were no rarities reported in our area, but a Spotted Flycatcher was the first of the southward movement of this species, which peaks in September. Observers on the coast are reporting warblers gathering, so Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers seen in our area now may be in transit. One of our members who monitors heathland in the west of our area was fortunate to see a Garden Warbler with young, but also reported that 8 Willow Warbler territories yielded fledgelings from just 2 nests. Willow Warblers arrived in the spring in good numbers, but they are insectivorous and must have suffered from the drop in insect numbers that has created alarm across the whole country this year: locally, some gardeners are noticing that flowering shrubs that normally teem with bees are quiet. The long-term downward trend in insects has been attributed by researchers to agricultural chemicals and climate change; the big drop this year must be due to the peculiar weather pattern.

Now is a good time to look out for aerial activity of birds of prey. They can sometimes be seen in family groups in which juveniles gain experience of hunting: Sparrowhawks were seen in a lively performance in a garden this week. In-flight feeding of youngsters among Swifts and hirundines is also exciting to watch.

Our heathlands are currently richly coloured by the dense magenta flowers of Bell Heather, looking more intense than usual thanks to the frequent rain this summer. The paler flowers of Heather (or Ling) are still in the bud stage.

Butterfly and moth numbers perked-up a little this week. Reasonable numbers of Grayling were again reported from heathlands to the north. An overnight session near Graffham by a moth expert yielded an amazing 192 species, including the first record of Ringed Border in the county. Closer to the town, the colourful Jersey Tiger was found - a species that is spreading into our area both from the west and north-east. Now is the time of year to look on our heathy commons for Antler Moths nectaring on ragwort – this species has experienced a massive UK decline in the last few decades, and the sighting this week was the first at the location for 3 years, having previously been frequent. Other uncommon species this week included The Drinker (named from the dew-sipping habits of its caterpillar!), Maple Pug (two occurrences); Toadflax Pug (very colourful by pug standards!) and Dusky Sallow (usually restricted to chalklands), plus the micromoths *Caloptilia honoratella* (very rare but unconfirmed), *Opostega salaciella* (very few records in the vice-county) and *Evergestis limbata* (an increasing species).

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Photos: Antler Moth (by A. Swan); The Drinker moth (by M. Tomsett); the micromoth *Opostega salaciella* (by A. Swan); True Lover's Knot moth (by M. Tomsett); Treble Brown Spot moth (by J. Godden); Dusky Sallow moth (by M. Tomsett); the micromoth *Caloptilia honoratella* (by A. Swan); Toadflax Pug moth (by A. Swan); Maple Pug moth (by A. Swan); the micromoth *Evergestis limbata* (by A. Swan).

