

## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 4/8/24.

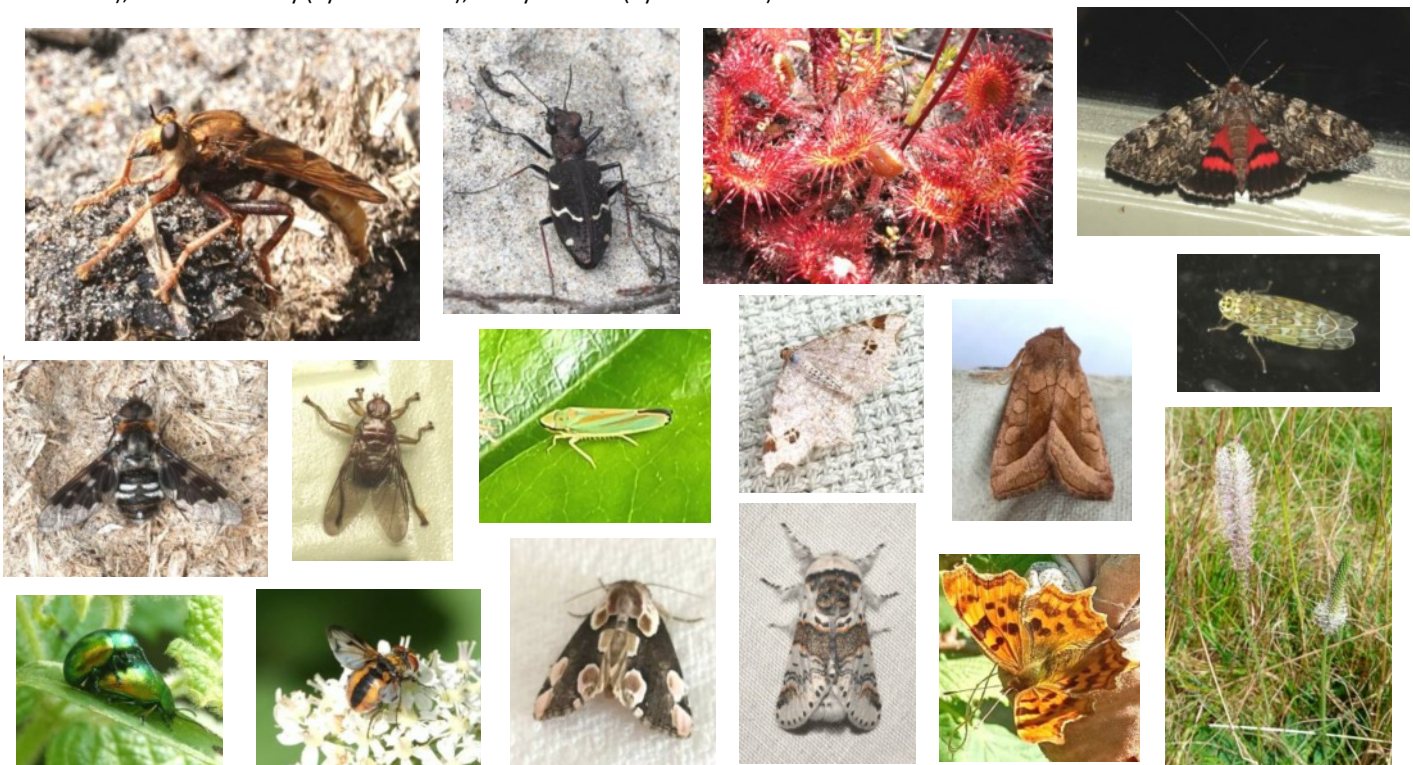
There are around 7000 species of Diptera (true flies) in the UK, and this week an extraordinary set of these were found that illustrates the group's diversity and ecological significance: the Mottled Bee-fly, which is rare but has a stronghold on heaths in our area; the equally rare large and grotesque hornet-mimic Hornet Robberfly; the boldly marked tachinid fly *Ectophasia crassipennis*, a southern European species that has been very rare in the UK until a northward expansion in the last few years; and the bird-parasite *Ornithomya avicularia*. The first two of these were seen on the Society's field meeting at Thursley Common, which was coincidentally the focus of Sunday evening's Countryfile on BBC1. It is a nationally significant area for wet and dry heath, and the group also saw the rare Heath Tiger Beetle, plus Emperor and Keeled Skimmer dragonflies and two species of sundew. Other attractive insects this week included the shiny metallic Mint Leaf Beetle, an early showing of the Rhododendron Leafhopper and the much smaller (3.5mm) uncommon leafhopper *Eupteryx decemnotata*. A few fresh Comma butterflies were seen, but the early August (usually) flush of Peacock butterflies has yet to appear. The very different Peacock Moth was among an attractive set of moths this week that included Sallow Kitten, Light Crimson Underwing, Peach Blossom and Rosy Rustic.

There are currently several species of umbellifer flowering, especially Hogweed on wasteland and rough grassland, Wild Angelica in wet places and Wild Carrot on dry grassland and roadsides. The large masses of flowers of these are good places to look for nectaring insects. The plantains are a group of undemonstrative plants with green flower spikes, but the Hoary Plantain stands out as being conspicuous and quite attractive on dry chalky places.

In a slim week for local bird reports, the clear highlight was Honey Buzzards at Woolbeding. Gilbert White recorded this species nesting at Selborne in 1780, but it is now a rare breeder in southern UK, and most sightings are of birds that are not breeding this year and have strayed across the Channel. Spotted Flycatchers continue to be reported, including one in a local garden.

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

Photos: Hornet Robberfly (by A. Swan); Heath Tiger Beetle (by A. Swan); Round-leaved Sundew (by A. Swan); Light Crimson Underwing moth (by A. Swan); Mottled Bee-fly (by A. Swan); the fly *Ornithomya avicularia* (by A. Swan); Rhododendron Leafhopper (by M. Tomsett); Peacock Moth (by M. Tomsett); Rosy Rustic moth (by M. Tomsett); the leafhopper *Eupteryx decemnotata* (by A. Swan); Mint Leaf Beetles (by A. Swan); the fly *Ectophasia crassipennis* (by A. Swan); Peach Blossom moth (by M. Tomsett); Sallow Kitten moth (by A. Swan); Comma butterfly (by M. Tomsett); Hoary Plantain (by V. McClure).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 11/8/24.

It is now the peak of the season for heathland colour, and the lack of any periods of drought this year has resulted in a particularly vivid wash of purple hues. The pink Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and the Dwarf Gorse have now joined the Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) to make up the full palette. Meanwhile, watersides are enlivened by Purple Loosestrife and Great Willowherb.

Remarkably, the huge Tanner Beetle (one of the longhorns) turned up in two places this week. It is regarded as rare in the UK, but we see it almost annually: the west Weald is a favoured place, along with the New Forest and Epping Forest. Now that it is the season for picnics and barbecues, it is useful to be aware of the difference between stinging wasps and the large number of harmless species that mimic wasps in order to deter predators. It is easiest to distinguish hoverflies, thanks to their hovering ability and flattish bodies, but there are also many black-and-yellow striped harmless wasps, sawflies and bees. Several digger wasps were noted this week, including two sightings of a species of *Ectemnius* and the uncommon *Lestiphorus bicinctus*. The several species of stinging wasp all have similarly patterned conical abdomens; the Median Wasp seen this week is typical and is less frequent than the Common and German Wasps.

It is proving to be a good year for unusual flies, especially in the group known as the tachinids: these lay eggs on or near other insects, which their larvae consume. They tend to be quite stout and bristly insects. One of the particularly interesting species found this week was *Sturmia bella*, which is a parasitoid on caterpillars of the Small Tortoiseshell butterfly and has been implicated in the decline in that species in recent decades. Two closely related small tachinids found were both in the group known as the "balloon bellies": the rare *Gymnosoma rotundatum* and the (apparently) even rarer *Cistogaster globosa*, both nectaring on umbellifers. Other interesting insects this week were the Oak Bush-cricket, which has a habit of finding its way into houses, and the Shore Sexton Beetle, which buries carrion to feed its larvae. Moths included two closely related species with different fortunes: the Marbled Beauty has declined hugely in the last few decades, whilst the Tree-lichen Beauty was unknown in Surrey last century, but is now a regular. The larvae of both species feed on lichens, so this disparity is a puzzle. The fresh generation of Peacock butterflies has emerged, and are likely to be found on Buddleia bushes through the rest of the summer.

An Osprey was reported at Farnham Heath. More Spotted Flycatcher sightings were reported, including two families with adults feeding young in Woolmer Forest – this species is seldom seen locally except on migration.

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

Photos: Tanner Beetle (by A. Swan); the digger wasp *Ectemnius* sp. (by A. Swan); the digger wasp *Lestiphorus bicinctus* (by A. Swan); the hoverfly *Eristalis nemorum* (by J. Godden); Median Wasp (by A. Swan); Oak Bush-cricket (by M. Tomsett); Marbled Beauty moth (by A. Swan); Tree-lichen Beauty moth (by M. Tomsett); Green Carpet moth (by M. Tomsett); the fly *Sturmia bella* (by A. Swan); the fly *Gymnosoma rotundata* (by J. Godden); the fly *Cistogaster globosa* (by A. Swan); the fly *Phasia hemiptera* (by J. Godden); Shore Sexton Beetle (by M. Tomsett); Great Willowherb (by A. Swan).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 18/8/24.

For birders, most of the action this week was to the south: a remarkable 21 species of wader were seen in a day at Pagham Harbour (including a rare Semipalmated Sandpiper), and the nearby hedges were loaded with migrating warblers. There were boasts of 10 species of birds-of-prey seen in 2 days in Sussex, but we did have some local excitement, as a Peregrine and a Hobby were seen simultaneously at Woolmer Pond, with the latter chasing the former! Ponds like this are principally the hunting ground of Hobbies after dragonflies. A Kestrel was seen also hunting dragonflies at Thursley Common.

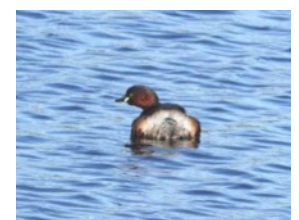
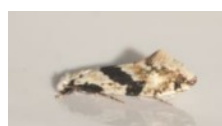
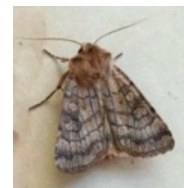
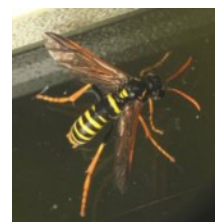
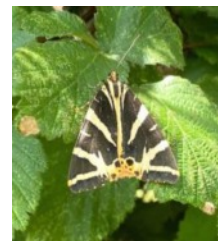
Many dragonflies remain very active through to the early autumn: Black-tailed Skimmers, Keeled Skimmers, Black Darters, Common Darters, Emerald Damselflies and Small Red Damselflies were among those seen this week. Late summer is the best time to identify Orthoptera (grasshopper and crickets), as they are now mature, having passed through 5 or 6 immature stages (instars), each with confusingly different features. Roesel's Bush-cricket has a conspicuous pale border to the saddle-shaped thorax, and is one of the many beneficiaries of climate change, having increased in numbers and geographical spread dramatically this century.

The last of the Bog Asphodels are now in flower. In some places on the surface of peaty ponds in boggy places, the intricate leaves of Lesser Bladderwort can also be found. This is a carnivorous plant: its underwater leaves have bubble-like "bladders" that spring open and shut when triggered by water fleas (*Daphnia*) and suchlike; enzymes are then excreted to gain nutrients from their prey – nutrients are at a premium in acid bog water.

The season continues to be poor for butterflies. Moths are also quite disappointing in abundance and diversity, but interesting species this week included the Six-striped Rustic and Lime-speck Pug, plus some attractive micro-moths: *Argyresthia brockeella* and the rare *Nemapogon clematella* (found in a bathroom!). The striking Jersey Tiger has been unprecedentedly abundant this year in locations to our north east and southwest, but is still a rarity locally. Other interesting insects included the uncommon hoverfly *Eristalis similis* (quite new to the UK); the sexton beetle *Nicrophorus vespillo*; the Figwort Sawfly; and the uncommon hoverfly *Chrysotoxum bicinctum* (these last two are wasp mimics). Knopper galls, induced on Pedunculate Oaks by the gall wasp *Andricus quercuscalicis*, can now be found in places where there are also the non-native (and sometimes unwelcome) Turkey Oaks, which the gall wasps use in another phase of their life cycle.

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Photos: Roesel's Bush-cricket (by V. Carter); Bog Asphodel (by A. Swan); the sexton beetle *Nicrophorus vespillo* (by M. Tomsett); Jersey Tiger moth (by M. Tomsett); Figwort Sawfly (by A. Swan); Black-tailed Skimmer (by A. Swan); the hoverfly *Eristalis similis* (by J. Godden); knopper gall (by M. Tomsett); Six-striped Rustic moth (by M. Tomsett); Lime-speck Pug moth (by M. Tomsett); the hoverfly *Chrysotoxum bicinctum* (by M. Tomsett); the micromoth *Argyresthia brockeella* (by A. Swan); the micromoth *Nemapogon clematella* (by A. Swan); Lesser Bladderwort (by A. Swan); Little Grebe (by A. Swan).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 25/8/24.

The wet weather through most of the year is a plausible reason for the widely-reported drop in butterfly numbers, which now seems to be affecting the late summer fliers. However, it can hardly be blamed for the poor summer season for fungi: there are normally plenty of brittlegills (*Russula* species), amanitas and boletes whenever there are wet spells in July and August, but woodland floors have been nearly bare this year, apart from the ubiquitous Common Earthballs. Just a few scrappy fungi were found following rain this week.

Swallows are still present, sometimes accompanied by predatory Hobbies, but they will soon be gone. Ospreys have been seen heading south in various places in southern England, including one reported at Shackleford this week. Yellow Wagtails and Ringed Plovers were reported passing through Thursley Common.

Among the typical late summer butterflies, Grayling and Small Copper have been seen, but nymphalids (such as Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell) are still sparse. One line of investigation into the varying success of butterflies is the life stage in which they over-winter: perhaps those over-wintering as chrysalises (such as most of the whites), rather than as eggs or caterpillars, have fared better. Moth numbers are down, but a few species have had boom years: Jersey Tigers, Light Crimson Underwings and Gypsy Moths in particular. Gypsy Moths have until this year been rare: there was a UK subspecies in East Anglia that became extinct in 1907, and there have been occasional migrants across the Channel since the 1950s, but it is now clear that the species is breeding in southern England. Locally, numbers started increasing in 2019 and this year it seems to be everywhere, and never before so abundant in the UK. Other interesting moths this week were Treble-bar, Pale Eggar and the micromoths *Pandemis corylana* and *Ypsolopha sequella*.

A tiny rodent rescued from a pool, where it had probably evaded a predator, resembled a Harvest Mouse, but an expert's verdict was that it was a young vole. It is, nevertheless, a good time to look for Harvest Mouse nests, which are tennis ball sized hollow spheres of dry grass attached knee-high to tall grass stems, often around field edges.

Interesting late summer flowers included Carline Thistle and Common Fleabane. As the name suggests, Common Fleabane was once used as a flea deterrent, but, curiously, although some closely related species contain the insecticide pyrethrin, Common Fleabane does not have it in functional concentrations.

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Photos: Barn Swallow (juvenile) (by M. Tomsett); juvenile vole (by M. Tomsett); Gypsy Moth (by M. Tomsett); Gypsy Moth (by A. Swan); Field Grasshopper (by A. Swan); the micromoth *Ypsolopha sequella* (by A. Swan); the micromoth *Pandemis corylana* (by M. Tomsett); Grayling butterfly (by A. Swan); Pale Eggar moth (by M. Tomsett); chrysalis of Large White butterfly (by A. Swan); Common Fleabane (by M. Tomsett); Carline Thistle (by A. Swan); Treble-bar moth (by M. Tomsett); Common Zebra Spider with prey (by A. Swan); brittlegill (*Russula* sp.) (by M. Tomsett).

