

## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 2/3/25.

The Society's visit to RSPB Medmerry (Selsey) was chiefly intended to view coastal birds, but although Avocets, Ringed Plovers, Golden Plovers, Mediterranean Gulls and other wetland birds were among the 42 species seen, the highlight was probably an unusually large flock of Yellowhammers. This is a species that we associate with hedges in chalk country, but a few do breed in heathy commons in the Haslemere area. In the winter they head south to the coast or across the Channel; the flock of more than 30 at Medmerry seems to have consisted of the over-wintering birds supplemented by some early migrants.

The Black-throated Thrush reported last week at Lindford remained in the Bordon area for the whole of this week. A look at previous records of this Siberian species shows that, typically, only one bird is seen per year in the whole of the UK, and these sightings are more often in Scotland, so it is a big event for the local birding community.

Other bird reports this week included the rare Ring-necked Duck on a pond near Alford (possibly a stray bird from its native North America, but perhaps an escape from a wildfowl collection); a Woodcock at Linchmere Common "roding" (a territorial flight); and at Thursley Common a Barn Owl patrolling regularly during daylight hours, plus a single Hawfinch passing through.

The sunny days brought out large numbers of Honeybees on to winter-flowering heathers in gardens, plus a few bumblebees (Buff-tailed), Drone Flies and scattered reports of Red Admiral butterflies out of hibernation. The most interesting insect of the week, though, was a Cinnamon Bug (*Corizus hyoscyami*), which is one of many insect species that were formerly only coastal, but are now spreading northwards.

Several plants of Colt's-foot found at Medmerry were a reminder that this attractive plant has declined hugely in recent years, except at coastal sites. Its flowers have scaly stems and it appears at this stage to be leafless: no leaves appear until after the flowers wither, and they are large and horseshoe shaped. Its favoured inland habitat is between roads and roadside ditches, perhaps thriving on mud dug from the ditch. Does it still grow in the Haslemere area?

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

Photos: Yellowhammer at Medmerry (by A. Swan); Reed Bunting at Medmerry (by A. Swan); Cinnamon Bug (by M. Tomsett); Colt's-foot at Medmerry (by A. Swan); the ground beetle *Carabus nemoralis* (by M. Tomsett); Honeybee (by A. Swan); Red Admiral (by M. Tomsett).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 9/3/25.

A long-awaited warm spell immediately triggered the awakening from hibernation of good numbers of Brimstone butterflies – this was noted on the same day in many places across our area. There were also a few Commas and Peacocks, also out of hibernation, but we are still looking out for the first butterflies of spring that are fresh adults (i.e. just out of their chrysalises), which will be Orange-tips.

There was a parallel boom in numbers and diversity of nocturnal moths, with the uncommon Yellow Horned possibly the best, but also Oak Beauty, Oak Nycteoline, Hebrew Character, Common Quaker and Small Quaker. The best micro-moth was the uncommon *Acleris cristana*, which is readily identified by the large tufts of greatly lengthened scales on each wing. It is just as well that they have this key feature, as there is little consistency in colour pattern, with more than 100 forms recognised. Some Victorian collectors specialised in accumulating the full range!

The beginning of “ornithological spring” could be defined by the first singing Chiffchaff, and indeed that event did occur this week in Woolmer Forest, although it hasn’t yet been heard in most places. One of our members visited Kingley Vale (north of Chichester) to see the exceptional Hawfinch gathering, and estimated that he saw 100 of these spectacular birds in the Yew woods. Otherwise, it was a quiet week for birds locally, although there was a report of a Ruddy Shelduck at Milford: probably an “escape” rather than a vagrant.

Frogs have now spawned in their favoured ponds. Other freshwater activity included “whirligig” beetles swimming in circles on the surface, and Common Backswimmer bugs, which will prey on tadpoles when they emerge. The progress of spring among the local flora included Sweet Violets: generally the first of the *Viola* species to flower, and distinguished from others by their more rounded leaves as well as by their scent.

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Photos: Comma butterfly (by M. Tomsett); Yellow Horned moth (by A. Swan); the micro-moth *Acleris cristana*: 3 views (by A. Swan); Oak Beauty moth (by A. Swan); Tree Bumblebee (by M. Tomsett); Buff-tailed Bumblebee (by M. Tomsett); Common Backswimmer bug (by A. Swan); Hebrew Character moth (by A. Swan); Oak Nycteoline moth (by M. Tomsett); Yew woods at Kingley Vale (by P. Nevett).





## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 16/3/25.

We had just one extra day of the previous week's warm weather, and that yielded more butterflies, moths and beetles. The most significant were: a Shoulder Stripe moth, a species that has been declining steadily for the last 15 years; the micro-moth *Acleris umbrana*, categorised as Nationally Scarce, but quite regular in our area; and a Black Sexton Beetle, usually the first of this carrion-burying group to appear in the spring.

A northerly air stream then returned to stall the development of the season, with frosty mornings and very cold air by day. Some colour in woodlands and hedgerows was provided by the blossom of Cherry Plum (*Prunus cerasifera*), a non-native "garden escape" which can appear in quite wild settings: it is very effectively "bird-sown". Primroses and Wild Daffodils made slow progress towards full bloom.

There has been little bird news, with the anticipated incoming migrants no doubt held up on the other side of the Channel by the head wind. The first hirundines of spring are usually Sand Martins, and there was an isolated report of a few of these as close as Hinton Ampner. Barn Swallows have been reported from the westerly parts of the country, which escaped the worst of the plume of cold air.

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Photos: Thawing hoar frost on blossoms of *Prunus cerasifera* (Cherry Plum) (by A. Swan); Black Sexton beetle (by M. Tomsett); Comma butterfly (by A. Swan); Red Admiral butterfly (by A. Swan); Shoulder Stripe moth (by M. Tomsett); Yellow Horned moth (by A. Swan).



## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 23/3/25.

A few Chiffchaffs could be heard singing, rather half-heartedly, on Tuesday, but by Thursday there were good numbers of them in full voice everywhere, thanks to the return of warm weather. Migrant Sand Martins were seen at Woolmer Pond, and it won't be long before we have other hirundines and Willow Warblers. There was a report of a Hawfinch just to the west of the town and another at Thursley, so the remarkable year for this species continues. The excellent set of records from Tice's Meadow (Farnham) was supplemented this week by a pair of Spoonbills – these amazing birds are increasing in the UK, but usually just along the coasts.

Butterflies also enjoyed the weather, with several reports of Peacocks, in particular. An attractive and uncommon picture-winged fly, *Tephritis formosa*, was found, which was a reminder of what an exceptional year 2024 was for unusual flies locally. Moths were abundant through the mild nights, with 132 individuals of 13 species counted in one moth trap! The more attractive included Brindled Beauty, Engrailed and Early Thorn, whilst the most curious was the micro-moth *Pammene giganteana* (small, despite its name!). This seems to be the first record of the species in S W Surrey for many years, and it has a very unusual life history: larvae feed in the galls on oak trees that are induced by gall wasps for their own larvae, but the moth larvae do not apparently damage their hosts!

Botanical highlights included the first Cuckooflowers and, in open areas on commons to the west of the town, possibly the peak of the Wild Daffodil display.

The Society's visit to a stretch of the River Rother focussed on the attempts to restore the river ecosystem, for the benefit of fish, anglers and wildlife in general. Samples from the river bed were rich in freshwater snails, small fish and invertebrate larvae, including large numbers of "flat-bodied stone-clingers", which were larvae of the mayfly *Heptagenia sulphurea* (the "Yellow May Dun" of anglers).

Sadly, the condition of the Wey stream between Shottermill and Camelsdale was not so happy on Sunday, following a pollution incident which created huge masses of foam and killed large numbers of fish – possibly everything in the river in that stretch. Environment Agency officers were rapidly on the case, and it is hoped that prosecutions will result from this environmental vandalism, whether deliberate or negligent.

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

Photos: Cuckooflower (by A. Swan); Peacock butterfly (by A. Swan); Wild Daffodils (by A. Swan); Brindled Beauty moth (by M. Tomsett); the micro-moth *Pammene giganteana* (by M. Tomsett); Engrailed moth (by M. Tomsett); the fly *Tephritis formosa* (by A. Swan); the "flat-bodied stone-clinger" larva of the mayfly *Heptagenia sulphurea* (by A. Swan).





## Wildlife News

### Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 30/3/25.

The weather settled into a pattern of morning mists followed by sunshine: a spring reminiscent of the “lockdown” season of 2020. Lesser Celandines have been glaringly bright on waysides and Primroses are in full flower. Cowslips may be found in a few places, but these are more characteristic of the chalk country, so in our area they indicate unusually limey soils (sometimes due to soil disturbance) or artificial sowing. In places along the banks of the Wey, some weird white and purple growths are stirring: the flower buds of Purple Toothwort. This is a leafless and stemless parasite on the roots of trees (especially willows). Also by the Wey, a liverwort found on tree bark proved to be *Radula complanata* (“Even Scalewort”), which seems to be uncommon in our area. As with many lichen species, it disappeared during the years of high atmospheric sulphur dioxide, but is now recovering.

The first local Barn Swallows of the season were seen at Woolmer Pond, but a more exciting sighting at the same place was an Osprey, on its way northwards. On the basis of a description from a non-birder, a bird seen in the Punchbowl area must surely have been a Ring Ouzel; a few have been reported in England this week, and we should expect more to be seen on our local hills soon.

The warmest evenings produced an abundance of moths. Joining the large numbers of common species (especially Common Quakers and Small Quakers) were some rarities: the White-marked and Blossom Underwing being particularly notable. Micro-moths included *Acleris literana*, *Acleris cristana* (the third different colour form this season) and a smart *Caloptilia* that would require microscopy for definitive identification (either *C. betulicolor* or *C. elongella*). Butterflies, particularly Brimstones, were on the wing, although not in huge numbers, and the first bee-flies of the season were visiting garden flowers.

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Photos: Cowslip (by A. Swan); Streamer moth (by M. Tomsett); flower buds of Purple Toothwort (by A. Swan); Lesser Celandines (by V. Carter); the micro-moth *Caloptilia* sp. (by A. Swan); the micro-moth *Acleris literana* (by M. Tomsett); the micro-moth *Acleris cristana* (by A. Swan); White-marked moth (by M. Tomsett); Blossom Underwing moth (by M. Tomsett); the liverwort *Radula complanata* (by A. Swan).

