

Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 7/12/25.

Despite the gloomy conditions this week, one animal was conspicuous enough: an albino Grey Squirrel was seen near Bordon. It had pink eyes, which showed that it was a true albino – having no pigment at all. This genetic variant is reckoned to have a frequency of about 1 in 100,000, which means that there may be about 20 albino squirrels in the UK!

The best bird report was a Hen Harrier in the remarkable Tice's Meadow reserve (Farnham), but miserable weather may be the reason for the sparseness of other reports, although small flocks of Redwings were seen occasionally.

The rain was borne on winds with a southerly component, and this held temperatures up to the extent that the minimum temperature in the last night of the week was much warmer than the average daytime temperature for the time of year. This brought out a good set of insects on a dry night, including the standard set of seasonal moths. A fresh Red-green Carpet was not a great surprise, as this species has a long season, comprising two generations, and this week is just towards the end of the second. It has enjoyed an increasing trend this century, and has been exceptionally frequent this year.

Many tiny bugs were found around windows, including *Ectopsocus briggsi*, which is a tiny (3mm) psocopteran bug. This group of bugs include the "booklice" indoors and "barklice", like this one, outdoors. It was interesting to note that it has three ocelli (simple eyes) on top of its head, supplementing the compound eyes. This arrangement of three ocelli is widespread, but not ubiquitous, among insects: diverse groups such as damselflies and wasps also have it. This suggests that it was a feature of their common ancestor, which lived early in the history of the insects – probably in the Carboniferous period, more than 300 million years ago. It is thought that these extra eyes have a function related to orientation in flight. *Simulium* blackflies also showed up, with both males (big eyes) and females (small eyes) that were probably of the same species, despite their differences. Perhaps the final micro-wasp of the year was found, a red-eyed black species that on-line experts think may belong to the genus *Tetrastichus*.

Lawns and other areas of short grass continued to support Snowy Waxcaps in large numbers, an exception in an otherwise poor year for this group of fungi. A grassy place under pines produced Milk-white Brittlegills (*Russula delica*), which, despite the name, are typically discoloured.

(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): albino squirrel (by M. Lawn); the bug *Ectopsocus briggsi*; enlargement of same showing ocelli; ocelli of ruby-tailed wasp for comparison; Milk-white Brittlegill (by M. Tomsett); Red-green Carpet moth; *Simulium* blackfly (male); *Simulium* blackfly (female); ?*Tetrastichus* micro-wasp.



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 14/12/25.

Tawny Owls have been noticeably vociferous recently: if the frequency of their calls is a good indicator, they seem to be more numerous than usual this season. Siskins, Redwings, Lesser Redpolls and Crossbills continue to be seen, usually in small flocks, in a variety of sites. The best birds this week, though, were a Peregrine and a Common Merganser at Thursley Common.

Added to the usual list of seasonal moths were Pale Brindled Beauty and Common Quaker, both of which were about a month earlier than expected. The very mild weather also permitted bumblebee activity around winter blossoms. The range of other active insects included Minotaur Beetles (whose freshly excavated burrows can now be found on heaths), leafhopper bugs, and the curious tiny psylloid bug *Trioza urticae*, which emerge from blister-like galls on nettles that are their larval home. The springtails aren't insects, but they are closely related: they belong to the class Collembola within the subphylum Hexapoda, which also includes the class Insecta. All insects are descended from a winged ancestor, but springtails never evolved flight, relying instead on a spring-loaded tail appendage to jump. Most are dull, but the striped and rather globular *Dicyrtomina saundersi* was found this week.

There are still a few fungi to be found on lawns and on wood, but a strange white structure that appeared on gravel this week was not fungus but a slime mould. Although unusual in form, being quite foliose, it was probably *Mucilago crustacea*, which has the new English name "Dog Vomit Slime Mould"! These structures are produced when previously mobile cells accumulate together for sexual reproduction and spore generation.

At this time of year, visitors to Petworth Park will find that the Fallow Deer have segregated themselves, with separate groups of stags and does. They graze at dawn and dusk, so they are likely to be found just dozing!

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Photos: Fallow Deer (by A. Swan); Minotaur Beetle (by M. Tomsett); the springtail *Dicyrtomina saundersi* (by A. Swan); Common Quaker moth (by M. Tomsett); Pale Brindled Beauty moth (by A. Swan); "Dog Vomit Slime Mould" (by M. Tomsett); the leafhopper bug *Zygina angusta* (by A. Swan); the bug *Trioza urticae* (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 21/12/25.

There was a first report this week of one of the sounds evocative of early spring: the drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker. This is territorial behaviour, with the new breeding season in mind. There was a good set of birds reported by our correspondent at Woolmer Pond: Teal, Gadwall, Woodlark, Crossbill, Reed Bunting and Dartford Warbler, but nothing exceptional.

It is easy to understand how Robins have become associated with this season: during a country walk in poor winter weather, it is possible to see many of them by the wayside, but virtually no other birds. The tameness of Robins around gardeners is thought likely to have developed in association with Wild Boar rooting in ancient forests, long before humans began turning soil over!

Sadly, one of the White-tailed Eagles that was part of the historic Sussex clutch is suspected to have been killed: it has just been revealed that its tag was found in September just east of Petersfield, having been cut off. The police have appealed for information.

The springtail noted last week turned out to be one of many that could be found on the frames of outdoor windows, presumably grazing on algae. With the goblinsque *Dicyrtomina saundersi*, there was also the longer but similarly coloured *Entomobrya intermedia*.

The mild, damp weather was suitable for fungi. In addition to a modest variety of small things on lawns and logs, a large patch of Orange Peel Fungus was found under a hedge. Cup fungi, of which this is one, continue to be occasional right through into the spring. At the end of the week was the winter solstice, so we can now look out for the re-awakening of plants. Catkins can be seen on Hazels, but they currently tightly closed with stamens well hidden.

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Photos (by A. Swan): Robin; Orange Peel Fungus; Mottled Umber moth; the springtail *Dicyrtomina saundersi*; the springtail *Entomobrya intermedia*; Robin.



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 28/12/25.

The north-easterly wind that started blowing in mid-week brought with it large numbers of grey geese: mainly Russian White-fronted Geese but with smaller numbers of Tundra Bean Geese. These have been reported in estuaries all along the coast in southern England, plus a few suitable inland sites, including Pulborough Brooks. Redwings can now be found wherever there are berries: there are a few Holly trees along hedgerows and woodland edges with plenty remaining. A flock of 85 at Valewood may be the biggest locally this season. There have been reports of an impressive Starling murmuration at dusk at Frensham Little Pond, the birds using the reed beds for roosting.

Prior to the drying effects of the north-easterly, the autumnal mild and wet conditions engendered a reasonable showing of fungi. Especially notable was Collared Earthstar (*Geastrum triplex*), found in two places close to the town. Earthstars are like puffballs, except that they have a thick extra external layer that splits and peels back to form a star shape. Also more characteristic of mid-autumn were Butter Cap (*Rhodocollybia butyracea*), Meadow Waxcap (*Cuphophyllum pratensis*) and Wrinkled Club (*Clavulina rugosa*). More usual in December was the tiny *Mycena clavularis*, found annually at this time of year on the bark of a garden tree.

There were a couple of nights early in the week that were excellent for moths, with the distinctively marked Satellite and large numbers of Mottled Umber turning up. The frequency of the latter this season has demonstrated the full range of its variation of wing pattern.

The first flowering of the season of a wild Primrose was observed this week, but further progress of spring will probably need to await another change of wind direction.

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Photos: Satellite moth (by M. Tomsett); *Mycena clavularis* (by A. Swan); Hazel catkins (unripe) (by T. Hardy); Collared Earthstar (by A. Swan); variation in Mottled Umber moths (all this season, by T. Hardy, A. Swan and M. Tomsett); Butter Cap (by M. Tomsett); Wrinkled Club (by M. Tomsett); group of Collared Earthstars (by A. Swan).

