

Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 1/2/26.

The extraordinary courtship rituals of Great Crested Grebes have started. Pairs facing each other and head-shaking is the commonest performance, but the “cat display” (head low and wings part extended) was also seen this week. It is a fascinating spectacle that is well worth spending time observing. Woodlarks are also feeling the approach of the breeding season, with their distinctive songs now easy to experience along the wooded edges of any of our larger heathlands. Other bird reports included Goosanders at Thursley Common (whilst they have been at Cutt Mills continuously for several weeks) and a Water Rail at the Deadwater valley.

Mosses and lichens are very different organisms, but there are similar issues involved in their identification: both may have helpful spore-generating structures (mosses have capsules on stalks and lichens have apothecia), but in some species these are rare and vegetative features need to be used. The range of moss leaf shapes is well illustrated by the common *Fissidens taxifolius* (arrays of broad blades, found on woodland banks) and *Grimmia pulvinata* (tufted leaves drawn out into a long hair-like tips, found on brick wall tops). Lichens found on the bark of twigs this week included: *Physcia aipolia*, which has abundant apothecia; *Physcia adscendens*, which usually lacks apothecia but has distinctive bristles; *Hypotrachyna revoluta*, found with rare apothecia; and *Candelaria concolor*, without apothecia but with a uniquely fine branching structure (branches 0.3mm wide) that is scarcely visible without a lens. This last species has increased its range recently, possibly thanks to its tolerance of airborne nitrate pollution. An easier botanical task unaided by flowers, and a reassuring sight in late winter, is the recognition of the spotted leaves of Early Purple Orchids. These are found as early as this annually at one site east of the town.

Most nights were too wet for moths, but one species was recorded as a first for the year: the well-named Dotted Border.

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

Photos: Great Crested Grebe courtship (by A. Swan); leaves of Early Purple Orchids (by M. Tomsett); Woodlark (by A. Swan); Dotted Border moth (by A. Swan); the lichen *Physcia aipolia* with apothecia (by A. Swan); the lichen *Physcia adscendens* (by A. Swan); the lichen *Candelaria concolor* (by A. Swan); the lichen *Hypotrachyna revoluta*, with stalked apothecia (by M. Tomsett); the moss *Grimmia pulvinata* (with unfurling spore capsules) (by A. Swan); the moss *Fissidens taxifolius* (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 8/2/26.

We are experiencing possibly the wettest few weeks in living memory, but this has been of little concern to our amphibian population. Newts hibernate away from water but are now finding their way back to ponds for the breeding season – probably a comfortable journey for them in the conditions. There has also been some pre-spawning activity from frogs.

It is easy to overlook the fact that it has been mild as well as wet, and this has prompted birds to start thinking about nesting: Blue Tits are investigating garden nesting boxes and we have heard that Barn Owls have entered a new HNHS-sponsored owl box at the National Trust's Woolbeding estate. Otherwise, there have been few unusual bird reports, although there was a sudden flurry of reports of large numbers of Fieldfares late in the week, and there has been an exciting but unconfirmed report of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker just to the east of the town.

A rare dry-ish night late in the week brought out moths in good numbers, especially Small Brindled Beauties, which were scarce last year. New for this year was a glamorous Oak Beauty. Minotaur Beetles continue to be found accompanying the moths – very familiar but still quite surprising. The first hoverfly has been seen, and there was a report of a Brimstone butterfly in the Guildford area (probably disturbed from its hibernation site during removal of ivy).

Lungworts have joined the list of spring flowers: although not native plants, they are well naturalised in wild places close to the town. The tiny red female flowers of Hazel haven't yet been seen; the puzzle of why the male catkins appear to precede them by several weeks may be because the opening of the catkins apparently doesn't mean that pollen is being released – a close look shows that the anthers haven't yet split open.

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Photos: Minotaur Beetle (by A. Swan); Lungwort (by A. Swan); Palmate Newt (by M. Tomsett); Hazel catkin showing anthers (by A. Swan); Blue Tit investigating a new nesting box (by M. Tomsett); Oak Beauty moth (by A. Swan); Common Quaker moth (by A. Swan); Marmalade Hoverfly (by M. Tomsett).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 15/2/26.

A Hazel Dormouse made a surprise appearance in a kitchen this week: a cat is thought to be responsible for the re-location. It was released unharmed. This protected species is scarce even where custom boxes are put up in prime habitat, so it is pleasing to find it in a suburban setting. There was evidence of early season activity of two other rodent species. Inside the new Barn Owl box at Woolbeding (sponsored by our Society) a pellet provided welcome evidence of use by owls, and disaggregating the pellet yielded a skull of a Field Vole, their favourite prey item (owl pellets comprise regurgitated indigestible material). It is too early in the season for a full survey of the efficacy of last autumn's Water Vole release program along the Wey, but their distinctive oval droppings have been found this week.

A check on a bat hibernation site yielded an uncommon moth: a Buttoned Snout, also hibernating. The larvae of this species feed on Hop leaves, and the decline of this moth parallels the decline of hop growing and the use of insecticides. Other moths this week included the first pug of the year, a Double-striped, and a Dotted Border. Although the continuing wet conditions were poor for insects, a Western Conifer Seed Bug was also found.

Early-flowering garden varieties of daffodil have been open for a couple of weeks, and now Wild Daffodils are nearly open on our commons.

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Photos: Hazel Dormouse (2 photos) (by T. Hardy); Double-striped Pug (by A. Swan); Buttoned Snout moth (by M. Phillis); Dotted Border moth (by M. Tomsett); Western Conifer Seed Bug (by M. Tomsett); skull of Field Vole (by D. Elliot).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 22/2/26.

Despite several more proper soakings, the weather did improve this week, with some mild, dry spells and even a little sunshine! It rapidly became the first good week of the year for insects, with bumblebees and drone flies on the wing during the brightest interludes. Leafhoppers included the uncommon *Linnavuoriana sexmaculata* and a remarkable intensely red variant of a *Zygina*, possibly *Z. rubrovittata* or *Z. angusta*. A fly with acute wing tips turned out to be one of the “spear-winged flies”, *Lonchoptera ?bifurcata*, and the first micro-wasps of the year were found. The most curious insect was a 3.5mm beetle that could be identified from a distinctive pattern of antennal segments: the last five segments were swollen, but the second of these was less so – a feature of the “round fungus beetles”, family Leiodidae. It seems very similar to the species *Leiodes calcarata*. Members of this family that have flat spiny legs, such as this one, are reckoned to use their legs for digging: they feed on underground fungi such as truffles! Edible truffles do not occur in our area, but there are many species of small and inedible truffle that this beetle might exploit. A good set of seasonal moths included March Moth (which is typically earlier than its name implies), Twin-spotted Quaker and Yellow-horned.

A remarkable botanical find was a fertile plant of the large liverwort *Conocephalum conicum*. This is a common species in damp, shady habitats, but it is normally sterile, relying on asexual reproduction. The spore-generating structures are spectacular (by liverwort standards!): long (up to 8cm) stalks support conical caps, under which are suspended spore capsules. These structures are called archegoniophores and are rare in S. E. England.

The first blossoms along hedgerows have appeared - the non-native *Prunus cerasifera*, although Blackthorn is also flowering early on the North Downs. Bright red stigmas can now be found protruding from female flowers on Hazels. Added to the list of early spring flowers is Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage, by the banks of the Wey.

The first returning Yellowhammer of the season was reported near Woolmer Pond, and Reed Buntings are appearing at breeding sites on watersides – they may be found away from water in winter. Skylarks were singing at Thursley Common.

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Photos (by A. Swan except where indicated): the leafhopper *Zygina ?rubrovittata*; the liverwort *Conocephalum conicum*, with spore capsules; Reed Bunting (winter plumage); the leafhopper *Linnavuoriana sexmaculata*; March Moth (by M. Tomsett); Twin-spotted Quaker moth (by M. Tomsett); the spear-winged fly *Lonchoptera ?bifurcata*; a diapiiid micro-wasp (3mm); the round fungus beetle *Leiodes ?calcarata*; Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage.

