

Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 1/3/26.

Wednesday was a beautiful spring day, and suddenly there were reports from almost everywhere of butterflies on the wing: mostly Brimstones but at least one Red Admiral. For the first time this year Honeybees and queen bumblebees (White-tailed and Buff-tailed) were out in numbers.

A heathland reptile survey produced an Adder, Common Lizards and Slow-worms: remarkable for February. Frogspawn appeared in ponds in large quantities - this event was about a week later than last year. Birders reported the first unambiguous cross-channel migrant of the season: Sand Martins. There was an apparent increase in Redwings locally, which may represent a movement back from over-wintering in the south-west. A Woodcock was seen at Woolmer Pond.

In terms of travel time, the closest coast to Haslemere is Farlington Marshes, just at the end of the A3, and this was the Society's destination for a field meeting on Saturday. The sheer quantity of Brent Geese was impressive - many hundreds - and it was good to see a large flock of Avocets. A Red-breasted Merganser was a highlight among about 40 species seen.

Newly flowering this week along many waysides was Lesser Celandine, which was glaringly bright in the sunshine. Scarlet Elf Cup fungi are often found in swampy places at this time of year, but a remarkable occurrence this week was a group of them on higher ground a long way from ponds or streams, no doubt connected with the wet weather.

New moths for the season were Hebrew Character and the multi-tufted *Acleris literana*. A Black Sexton joined the Minotaur in the year's nocturnal beetle list.

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

Photos: Adder (by V. Carter); Slow-worm (by V. Carter); Lesser Celandine (by J. Godden); Black Sexton Beetle (by T. Hardy); Shoveler pair at Farlington (by A. Swan); Red-breasted Merganser at Farlington (by A. Swan); mating Frogs and frogspawn (by J. Godden); Pintail pair at Farlington (by A. Swan); Scarlet Elf Cup (by A. Swan); Hebrew Character moth (by T. Hardy); *Acleris literana* (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 8/3/26.

In a week dominated by mist and drizzle, there were a couple of glorious sunny afternoons, and it was possible to find four species of butterfly: Brimstone, Comma, Peacock and Red Admiral. All of these over-winter as hibernating adults. The first singing Chiffchaffs of the season were reported at Woolmer Pond on Monday, then they were everywhere by Wednesday. Flocks of Siskins were reported in several places, and Dartford Warblers were quite easy to find on our heathlands. A Barn Swallow was reported at Selsey!

The first flowering of Bluebells was noted, and Wild Daffodils were approaching their peak. Other signs of spring were the first willow catkins: dull yellow catkins on Grey Willow in damp places, and the plumper and brighter catkins of Goat Willow (or Sallow) scattered along hedgerows and woodland edges. Probably connected with the fresh growth on willows was a *Dorytomus* weevil (probably *D. longimanus*): this beetle feeds on willows and the elongated part of its head (the rostrum) is used for piercing and feeding on sap. There are now enough nectar sources for a wider range of insects to emerge. In addition to bumblebees and honeybees, there are many species of smaller bee that are tricky to distinguish: Gwynne's Mining Bee (*Andrena bicolor*) is currently one of the commonest.

After the warm days, hundreds of moths were attracted to light at night: probably as many as at any time of year, although with less diversity (only about 12 species) than the summer. Common Quakers, Small Quakers and Brindled Pugs were super-abundant, whilst the less common species included Engrailed, Yellow Horned, Red Chestnut and Pine Beauty.

There were a couple of fungal curiosities. Many piles of cow dung on a National Trust reserve supported clusters of orange cup fungi, provisionally identified as the uncommon *Byssonectria aggregata*. The dung of commercial livestock is normally quite sterile, due to preventative chemical treatments, but grazing animals on nature reserves are usually not dosed in this way. Rust fungi are normally observed as discolorations and distortions on leaves, and the fungal species are often host-specific. The rust fungus of the herb Nipplewort was found this week; it has the name *Puccinia lapsanae*, based on *Lapsana*, which is the genus to which Nipplewort belongs.

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

Photos: Comma (by A. Swan); the weevil *Dorytomus ?longimanus* (by A. Swan); Red Chestnut moth (by M. Tomsett); Yellow Horned moth (by A. Swan); Brindled Pug (by M. Tomsett); Gwynne's Mining Bee (by A. Swan); the rust fungus *Puccinia lapsanae* (by J. Godden); the cup fungus *Byssonectria ?aggregata* (by V. Carter); drift of Wild Daffodils in drizzle (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 15/3/26.

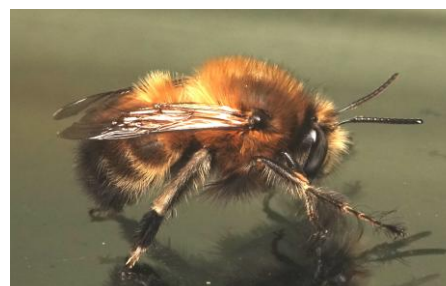
The stand-out sighting this week was a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker near Grayshott: a location where we haven't previously had reports of this elusive bird. After many decades of decline nationally (for unknown reasons), there is just a hint that it may be getting more widespread and frequent locally. It seems to prefer scruffy woodland near water. Woodcocks were reported from Woolmer Forest, the first Curlew of the season was at Thursley Common, and numbers of Chiffchaffs continued to rise. There were no other incoming migrants new for the season.

Although it was unpleasantly windy for much of the week, there was one night with conditions for moths as good as could be expected in March, and hundreds of moths of 15 species were recorded. Small Quakers accounted for about half of the count, with Common Quakers and Hebrew Characters also numerous. The Oak Beauty is having a good year, and Frosted Green and Brindled Beauty were new for the season, the latter appearing in a garden nine days earlier than the previous earliest. Other insects were subdued by the weather, although a Hairy-footed Flower Bee sheltering on a window provided a rare photo opportunity: this is a small hyper-active bee that flies erratically and fast (with a high-pitched buzz), and spends little time at each flower it visits, so it is normally difficult to photograph or to see its hairy feet!

The Snake's-head Fritillary has one of our most distinctive and bizarre flowers – "fritillary" means chequered, and its flower has the shape of a snake's head before it opens. It occurs in such huge numbers in a few meadows in south and central England that it has been argued to be native to the UK, but genetic analysis has linked our plants to eastern European populations, and it is now accepted that it has been introduced as a garden plant and "escaped" into the wild. It has been sown in a restored wildflower meadow by the Wey and is beginning to self-seed. Also a "garden escape", and found in a new site this week, is Creeping Comfrey (*Symphytum grandiflorum*). Comfrees (and their relatives, the Forget-me-nots) bear their flowers in a loose spiral (a "scorpioid cyme") that slowly unravels so that one flower at a time matures and opens. In Creeping Comfrey, mature flowers are white but immature ones are red. There are about nine species of comfrey in the wild in the UK, but only one is native. Very much a native, though, and just starting to spangle sunny banks, is Barren Strawberry: it is similar to a Wild Strawberry but with narrower petals, and is "barren" only to the extent that its fruits are dry and inedible.

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

Photos: Snake's-head Fritillary (2 photos) (by A. Swan); Barren Strawberry (by A. Swan); Creeping Comfrey (by A. Swan); Frosted Green moth (by M. Tomsett); Oak Beauty moth (by T. Hardy); Hairy-footed Flower Bee (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 22/3/26.

The antlers of Roe Deer males are currently looking fuzzy: while they are growing, antlers are covered in “velvet”, which is living furry skin. This layer dries and falls off when the antlers are fully grown. Antlers are a modification of bone, so it should be no surprise that they grow under a layer of skin. It is curious that, whilst horns of cattle are also bone, rhino horn is modified hair and the tusks of elephants and wild pigs are teeth; all of these structures are involved in competition for mates.

Although there was plenty of welcome sunshine, the air temperature was cool, and insects were not particularly abundant. Huge White-tailed and Buff-tailed Bumblebee queens were conspicuous enough as they took nectar and searched for holes for nesting, but ginger Common Carder Bees were also noted, plus much smaller bees including the Yellow-legged Mining Bee (*Andrena flavipes*). The first Dark-edged Bee-flies were seen, and drone flies were hovering in gardens. Sawflies have larvae that are voracious herbivores, and the first ones of the season included the Torpedo Sawfly (its name derives from its cylindrical abdomen), which emerges early to lay eggs on fresh leaf growth of hawthorns. Brimstone and Comma butterflies were frequent during the warmer spells, and the highlights of a mediocre moth week were a very early V-pug and the uncommon and declining Blossom Underwing.

Whilst frog spawn is a familiar sight in garden ponds, toad spawn is more likely to be found in larger ponds and lakes. It is very different, with eggs arranged in lines. Newt eggs are laid individually, secreted amongst underwater plants. New spring flowers included the delightful Cuckooflower, characteristic of damp meadows and waysides. The bonfire sites that follow conservation work on our heaths and commons are often found to be carpeted yellow-green with Bonfire Moss (*Funaria hygrometrica*). This has abundant spore capsules on stalks that are “hygrometric”: straight when wet and curled-up when dry.

Visitors to Haslemere Museum can now view live video from a bird nesting box in the Museum garden. As soon as the box (sponsored by our Society) was installed, a Blue Tit took in nesting material, so we are hoping that we will soon be able to follow the progress of a clutch.

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

Photos: Roe Deer with antlers “in velvet” (by A. Swan); Common Carder Bee (by J. Godden); Blossom Underwing moth (by M. Tomsett); Yellow-legged Mining Bee (by M. Tomsett); toad spawn (by J. Godden); Cuckooflower (by M. Tomsett); V-pug moth (by M. Tomsett); drone fly (by M. Tomsett); Torpedo Sawfly (by A. Swan); Grey Willow catkins (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 29/3/26.

The air remained cold this week, with occasionally heavy showers of powdery hail brought in on a northerly wind, and this suppressed the spring activity that we look for at this time of year. Nevertheless, there were increasing reports of Willow Warblers and Barn Swallows. At Frensham Great Pond, in addition to these species, there was an outstanding report of Black-necked Grebes, which will be passing through northwards: a few breed in Scotland, but many more in Denmark and east of the Baltic.

The display of Primroses probably reached a peak this week: they have shown well this year. In some damp woods Wild Garlic is beginning to reveal its umbels of white flowers, but in many places the non-native Few-flowered Garlic is making a bigger contribution to the aroma. It is curious that the smell-alike Garlic Mustard, a completely unrelated plant, has also just started flowering in similar places. The yellow-green umbellifer Alexanders is abundant along the Solent coast but it is now being seen increasingly in our area: this may be another effect of a warming climate. The elegant Summer Snowflake (poorly named, as it is a spring flowerer) occasionally spreads from gardens, but it was found in a new site this week that is some distance from houses. It is a native plant in a few swampy riversides, for example the Loddon valley north of Basingstoke, but it surely doesn't occur naturally in our area. Another "garden escape" usually found close to houses is Italian Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum italicum*). This has two very different subspecies: ssp. *italicum* is the garden plant and has very distinctively marked leaves, whilst ssp. *neglectum* is a rare native plant found along the north-facing scarp of the South Downs; it is small and relatively plain.

A lone insect, just 2mm long, found on a window on a cold day turned out to be a chalcidoid micro-wasp and was identified by an expert as *Mesopolobus tibialis*, which only has 26 records on the national database. It is a parasitoid of gall wasp larvae: one *Mesopolobus* larva will feed on a whole brood of gall wasp larvae and emerge from the gall as an adult in the spring. Curiously, research has shown that emergence of adults of this genus is more likely in cold weather! Also with an interesting life history is a rather ordinary looking fly found this week: *Leucophora obtusa*. A just-published book on UK flies (by Stephen Falk *et al.*) proposes the English name "Hairy Bee-shadower" for this species, as females follow mining bees and lay eggs in their nests: in this case, the fly larvae merely consume the food intended for the bee larvae, a theft known as kleptoparasitism. Similarly, the Bee Moth – also found this week, and exceptionally early – lays eggs in bumblebee and wasp nests, where its larvae are both kleptoparasites on the intended food store, but also they are parasitoids, as they will attack the live larvae of their hosts. Other new moths for the season this week included the Early Thorn and the rare and declining Lead-coloured Drab.

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

Photos: Summer Snowflake (by A. Swan); Italian Lords-and-Ladies (by A. Swan); Alexanders (by V. McClure); Primroses (by A. Swan); the chalcidoid *Mesopolobus tibialis* (2mm) (by A. Swan); Bee Moth (by M. Tomsett); Lead-coloured Drab (by M. Tomsett); Early Thorn (by M. Tomsett); the fly *Leucophora obtusa* (by A. Swan).

