

Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 5/4/26.

The first Orange-tip butterfly of the season was seen in mid-week. This is the first butterfly of the year to emerge fresh from a chrysalis; the earlier-seen species having all hibernated. Another special milestone in the progress of the season is the first Cuckoo, and there were rumours of a very early one at Thursley over the weekend. Other new incoming migrants seen in the broader local area included Redstarts, Tree Pipits, Whitethroats and Ring Ouzels, although these were all just ones and twos. A Nightingale was reported in the Chichester area!

Populations of Dartford Warblers can be decimated in a harsh winter, but they are currently thriving, and should be looked for in any patch of gorse on our heaths and commons - they are quite shy. There are fantastic photos on the Surrey Birding Facebook group, but there has been an alarm raised about a small minority of photographers who play a recording of its song to induce birds to come out into the open to investigate. This is unethical, as it can exhaust the birds at a critical time, and disturbing this species is actually illegal.

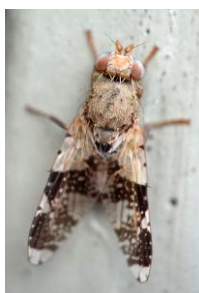
Barn Owls appear to be nesting in an owl box on a woodland edge to the east of the town. The population size of this species, and many others, is thought to be limited by availability of nest sites. A peculiarity of Barn Owls is that they have a strong preference for nesting in buildings, partly due to the availability of rodents around human habitations and farmed fields. This preference is observed in Barn Owls worldwide, and must surely reflect an association with humans going back thousands of years.

New moths for the season included Pine Beauty, Waved Umber, Streamer, Lunar Marbled Brown and a rarity: the micro-moth *Eriocrania unimaculella* (but not confirmed). Other interesting insects noted this week included the pattern-winged fly *Tephritis formosa*, the wood-boring beetle *Ptilinus pectinicornis* and an abundance on sun-bathed bushes of basking mining bees (*Andrena* spp.) with accompanying wasp-mimic nomad bees (*Nomada* spp.) – the latter parasitise the nests of the former.

A botanical treat at this time of the year is Moschatel, which is unique in having two different flower symmetries: each head has four five-petalled flowers facing horizontally, and one four-petalled flower facing vertically. Its occurrence is puzzling: it forms patches along paths but these are sparse and apparently randomly distributed.

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

Photos: Orange-tip butterfly (by A. Swan); Barn Owl (by M. Tomsett); Dartford Warbler (by A. Swan); Moschatel (by A. Swan); the fly *Tephritis formosa* (by A. Swan); the beetle *Ptilinus pectinicornis* (by A. Swan); Streamer (by M. Tomsett); Lunar Marbled Brown (by T. Hardy); Early Nomad Bee (by A. Swan); unidentified mining bee (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 12/4/26.

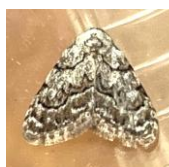
Sound was as important as vision to appreciate the incoming birds this week. A Cuckoo established itself at Thursley Common and another was heard at Linchmere. Nightingales were seen and heard at Milford Common and Ebernoe, the first local Garden Warbler was reported from Woolmer Forest and the first local Barn Swallow at Graffham. Reed Warblers were heard in several places and Sedge Warblers in one or two. Other notable reports were a Brambling at the Punchbowl (surely on its way back north-east) and a Little Ringed Plover, a Yellow Wagtail and an Osprey (just flying over) at Thursley Common. At Woolmer, a Willow Warbler was heard to occasionally switch to a Chiffchaff song! This has been reported occasionally, and is thought to be mimetic. In the case of rare hybrids between the two species, the song produced is of Willow Warbler type. Chiffchaffs apparently never impersonate Willow Warblers.

The yellows of early spring (daffodils, Primroses and Lesser Celandines) were gradually replaced by a predominance of blues: Bluebells, Common Dog-violets, Wood Forget-me-nots, Ground-ivy and Green Alkanet. Now is the time to look for Early Purple Orchids in woods to the south and east of the town.

Brimstone and Orange-tip butterflies seem to be having a good year, and Green Hairstreaks have been seen locally. A report in a newspaper quoted expert Matthew Oates as saying that the stage of development of Purple Emperor caterpillars is so advanced that adults could appear in May – more than a month early! The moth highlights were several of the attractive and uncommon Dotted Chestnut, and firsts of the season for Great Prominent, Least Black Arches, Muslin Moth and the shaggy Pale Tussock. On the warmest day of the week, the longhorn micro-moth *Adela reaumurella* was a spectacle on commons and in gardens, as males danced in numbers, evidently trying to impress females with their shimmering metallic green colours and long antennae. Mining bees (difficult to identify) with their accompanying nomad bees (only slightly easier) were again diverse and numerous, basking on sunlit bushes. Other interesting insects found were a Tortoise Shieldbug and the plant bug *Cacopsylla fulguralis*, which is a Japanese native that has only recently begun spreading in the UK, feeding on garden Eleagnus bushes.

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Photos: The micro-moth *Adela reaumurella* (by A. Swan); Wood Forget-me-not (by A. Swan); Pale Tussock (by M. Tomsett); Dotted Chestnut (by A. Swan); Gooden's Nomad Bee (by A. Swan); the micro-moth *Agonopterix arenella* (by M. Tomsett); Muslin Moth (by A. Swan); the plant bug *Cacopsylla fulguralis* (by A. Swan); Tortoise Shieldbug (by A. Swan); Least Black Arches (by T. Hardy); Early Purple Orchids with Bluebells (by M. Tomsett).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 19/4/26.

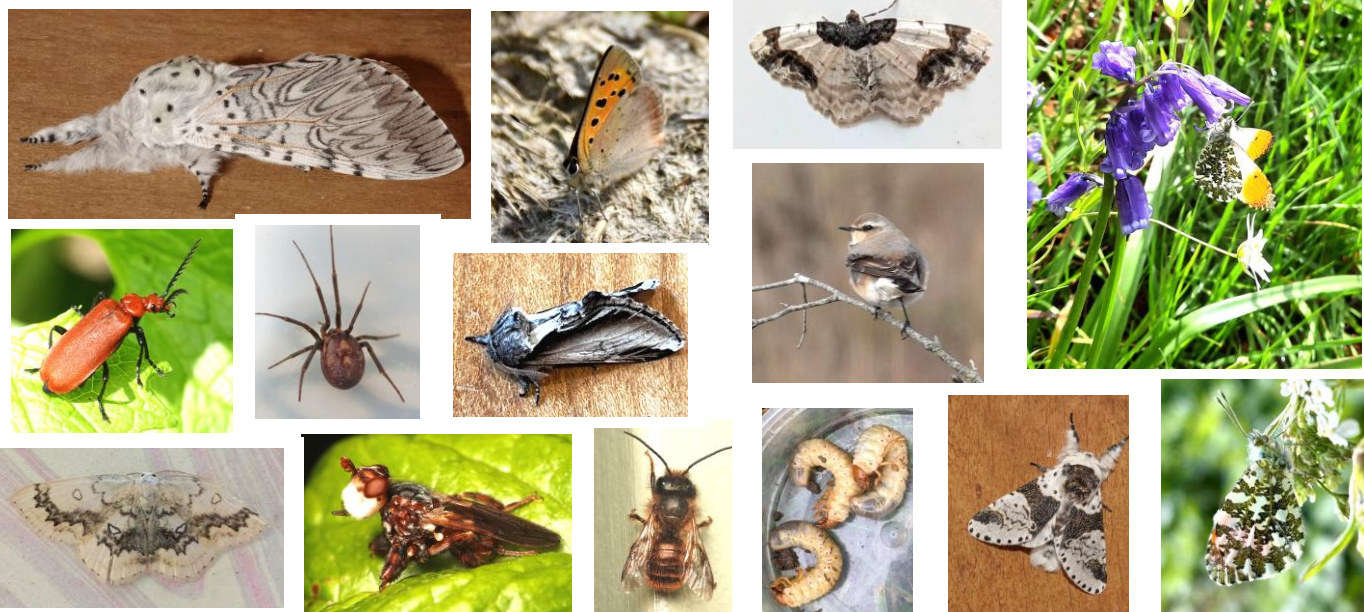
Insects dominated our observations this week. A diverse set of monochrome moths was headed-up by the amazing Puss Moth (surely one of our most beautiful insects), with Alder Kitten, Mocha, Scorched Carpet and Lesser Swallow Prominent also featuring. The first Small Copper butterfly of the season was seen, and Holly Blues and Orange-tips impressed by their abundance on the warmer days. Female Orange-tips lack the colour of the males and so look like one of the white butterfly species in flight, but at rest they show their uniquely mottled underwings. A large number of species of bee are on the wing, and these support of entourage of parasites and predators. The nomad bees have been cited in recent weeks, but this week a weird fly was noted in a place where bees were basking. The white fuzz on its face helped to identify it as *Myopa testacea*, one of the Conopsids ("thick-headed flies"). It was observed capturing a mining bee, claspng it tight underneath its body and then releasing it. This species lays an egg on each captured bee, then the larva slowly consumes the host's abdomen, eventually killing it, then pupating inside the corpse. A proposed new English name is Plain-winged Spring Beegrabber!

In two different locations, large white grubs were found underneath paving slabs: these seem to be larvae of Cockchafer beetles, the first adult of which was also found this week. A beautiful Red-headed Cardinal Beetle was also found. Two interesting spiders were encountered. First, the rather sinister-looking *Steatoda grossa* ("False Widow Spider"), which can bite people, usually with trivial impact but sometimes causing infections. It is a non-native species that has colonised southern England in the last few decades and is normally found on warm external walls. Second, a male of the crab spider *Misumena vatia*, which looks nothing like the large white/pink/green females of the species that are so familiar as ambush predators, camouflaged in flowers. This is a striking example of extreme sexual dimorphism (quite frequent in spiders).

The most spectacular bird report of the week was a White Stork at Unstead Water Meadows: presumably one of the birds from the re-introduction project at Knepp. A Siberian Chiffchaff was reported from Chiddingfold Forest - this has less yellow/green than the typical Chiffchaff and is generally regarded as a subspecies. Little Ringed Plovers continued to be seen at Thursley Common, and a Pintail was reported at Frensham Great Pond. Common Sandpipers were seen in several places, including by a small pond in the Hammer area! Wheatears have been passing through on their way north, with several sightings on the downs and heaths. Many observers noted the abundance of Blackcaps this week, delivering their delightful loud song along hedgerows.

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

Photos: Puss Moth (by A. Swan); Small Copper (by M. Tomsett); Scorched Carpet (by M. Tomsett); Orange-tip on Bluebells (by V. Carter); Red-headed Cardinal Beetle (by A. Swan); False Widow Spider (by J. Godden); Lesser Swallow Prominent (by T. Hardy); female Wheatear (by A. Swan); Mocha (by M. Tomsett); the fly *Myopa testacea* (by A. Swan); Red Mason Bee (by A. Swan); Cockchafer grubs (by M. Tomsett); Alder Kitten (by A. Swan); Orange-tip (by M. Tomsett).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 26/4/26.

With perfect timing, St. George's Mushrooms were seen on St. George's Day (23rd), and the black and fuzzy swarming St. Mark's Flies were seen on St Mark's Day (25th) - both take their names from their typical timings, but this is not usually very accurate! Also symbolic of spring were the sound of Cuckoos, which became more frequent and widespread this week, and the arrival of Swifts and Barn Swallows, though neither yet in large numbers. The first Hobby was reported at Woolmer Pond: these cross the Channel with the flocks of hirundines that they prey upon.

The Society visited the National Trust's "Woolbeding Re-imagined" project to view the early stages of this initiative to restore biodiversity to an area that had been poor-quality farmland with depleted soils. Currently, there is a flush of interesting "arable weeds" in some fields, and thousands of self-seeded tree saplings in others. The unusual and attractive Crimson Clover was found: in the past, this was grown as a fodder crop. It is a non-native subspecies of *Trifolium incarnatum*; there is a native subspecies (Long-headed Clover) which is restricted to south-west clifftops. We were pleased to see Barn Swallows at the NT offices, and our first Spotted Flycatcher of the season was seen along the hedgerows.

The best insect find of the week was the tortoise beetle *Cassida nobilis*, which is distinctly uncommon and not previously recorded in our area. Also rather uncommon was the delicate lacebug *Physatocheila dumetorum*, which is associated with Hawthorn. Two curious parasitic wasps were of contrasting sizes: *Echthrus reluctator* has a 18mm long ovipositor which is used to drill into wood to lay eggs on hidden beetle larvae, whilst *Metaphycus* is only 1.2mm long in total, and parasitises scale insects – it has been used commercially as a "biological control" where scale insects are a significant pest on fruit trees.

Most nights were cold – there were light frosts – so it wasn't a great week for moths, although the first Poplar Hawkmoth of the season was a welcome sight, with Pale Prominents also notable and Brimstone Moths reminding us that summer isn't too far away!

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Photos: St. George's Mushrooms (by M. Tomsett); Poplar Hawkmoth (by M. Tomsett); Bugloss (by A. Swan); Field Pansy (by A. Swan); Pale Prominent (by T. Hardy); Brimstone Moth (by T. Hardy); Solomon's Seal (by A. Swan); *Physatocheila dumetorum* (by A. Swan); Crimson Clover (by A. Swan); *Echthrus reluctator* (by A. Swan); *Cassida nobilis* (by J. Godden); *Metaphycus* (1.2mm) (by A. Swan).

