

Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 3/5/26.

The first Swifts of the season were seen over Haslemere - always an exciting sight and sound. A much rarer migrant species was reported at Selsey: a pair of Bee-eaters! Also arrived from across the Channel were Painted Lady butterflies: these were reported from several places, and in large numbers on the coast. In recent years, there have been promising early signs of a big Painted Lady season, but these have fizzled out. Definitely having a big season are Holly Blue butterflies, the abundance of which has been noted by many.

The clear skies and full moon discouraged a full showing of moths, but there were several firsts for the season, including Marbled Brown, Pale Oak Beauty, Clay Triple-lines and Pine Hawkmoth: each several weeks earlier than usual. A female Pale Tussock was observed freshly emerged from its chrysalis, still with crumpled wings, and was seen mating the following day! This is not uncommon behaviour in moths: females emit pheromones to attract males soon after emerging. Among a few day-flying moths was the micro-moth *Micropterix calthella*, which belongs to a primitive group of moths that uniquely retain the ancestral trait of chewing mouthparts, which they use to eat buttercup pollen. Other moths feeding at flowers just suck nectar.

Also first for the season were ruby-tailed wasps, and there was a good range of other insects active on sunny days. Three extraordinary flies were noted: *Elgiva cucularia* ("Grey S-veined Snail-killer"), the larvae of which consume snails; *Empis pennipes* ("Feather-legged Dagger Fly"), which is predatory but also uses its long proboscis to drink nectar, as evidenced by a dusting of pollen; and *Hilara maura*, which has swollen leg segments that contain an organ that makes spider-like "silk" that the male uses to wrap up prey items as gifts for its intended mate – mating may take place as the gift is unwrapped!

The rain at the end of the week was very welcome, but the dry spring had not been as severe as last year, when many spring and summer plants suffered badly. The rare Bird's-foot Clover couldn't be found at a local site last year, but it has re-appeared this week. Whilst other clovers have a mass of tiny pea-type flowers, in this species these flowers are separate and so the plant is difficult to find.

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

Photos: Ruby-tailed wasp (by A. Swan); Pine Hawkmoth (by M. Tomsett); Painted Lady (by M. Tomsett); Pale Tussock – freshly emerged (by V. Carter); Pale Tussocks mating (by V Carter); caterpillar of Lackey moth (by M. Tomsett); Clay Triple-lines (by M. Tomsett); Cinnamon Bug (by J. Godden); the fly *Hilara maura* (by A. Swan); Feather-legged Dagger Fly (by A. Swan); the micro-moth *Micropterix calthella* (by A. Swan); Bird's-foot Clover (by A. Swan); Grey S-veined Snail Killer fly (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 10/5/26.

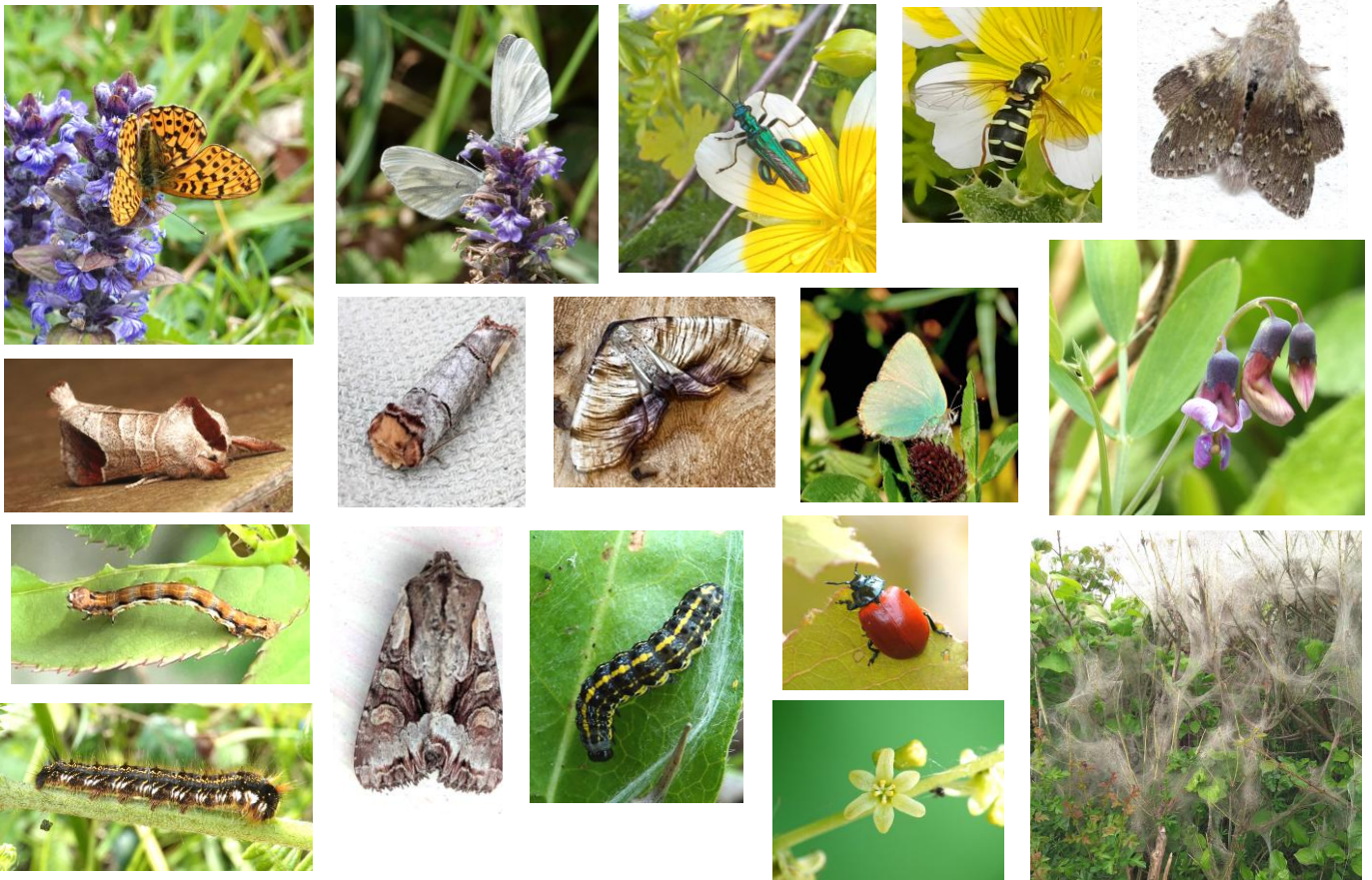
We are fortunate in having some excellent butterfly habitats in our area, the most nationally significant of which are the parts of Chiddingfold Forest where the rare Wood White can be found. This was the main focus of the Society's visit to a site in the Forest this week, and we were rewarded with many sightings of this delightful and delicate species, including some wing-flashing courtship behaviour. A remarkable (for the time of year) 10 species of butterfly were seen, including an unexpected Green Hairstreak. At a different local site, the Pearl-bordered Fritillary was on the wing: another rarity, with few populations in south-east England.

There was a surprising number of caterpillars found in the Forest, including the uncommon Blossom Underwing and Drinker moths. Mottled Umber caterpillars were found at three locations this week, but the most spectacular was the webbing created by the caterpillars of the Spindle Ermine, whilst defoliating the host Spindle bush! First occurrences of the season were recorded for adults of several moth species, including Chocolate-tip, Light Brocade, Scorched Wing, Buff-tip, Lobster and Coronet. Also season firsts were several dragonfly, damselfly and demoiselles species. The uncommon hoverfly *Xanthogramma citrofasciata* was recorded, apparently for the first time in our area. The spring flowers in Chiddingfold Forest included Bitter-vetch (the food plant of the Wood White), the strange flowers of Heath Milkwort and the tiny green flowers of Black Bryony: this is the only UK plant in the family that includes the yams; the symmetry of their flowers shows their relatedness to the lilies.

A Kittiwake was a surprise report from Frensham Great Pond. At Thursley, reports of Ringed Plovers were added to those of Little Ringed Plovers, and a Whimbrel was reported as well as the Curlews! Swifts are gradually becoming more widely seen locally, and the first Nightjars were reported, but not yet in nearby heathlands.

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Photos: Pearl-bordered Fritillary (by A. Swan); Wood Whites (by A. Swan); Thick-thighed Flower Beetle (by J. Godden); the fly *Xanthogramma citrofasciata* (by J. Godden); Lobster Moth (by M. Tomsett); Chocolate-tip (by A. Swan); Buff-tip (by M. Tomsett); Scorched Wing (by T. Hardy); Green Hairstreak (by A. Swan); Bitter-vetch (by A. Swan); caterpillar of Mottled Umber (by F. Line); caterpillar of Drinker (by A. Swan); Light Brocade (by M. Tomsett); caterpillar of Blossom Underwing (by A. Swan); Red Poplar Leaf Beetle (by A. Swan); Black Bryony (by A. Swan); webbing of Spindle Ermine moths (by V. McClure).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 17/5/26.

This week's rain was very welcome after a long dry spell, but it was also cold, with light frosts on a couple of cloudless nights. In exposed places, the fresh fronds of Bracken were "scorched" by the frost: this is not unusual, but generally occurs in April. It is surprising that such a robust and abundant plant should be vulnerable to frost damage, but it soon recovers. Other plants were not greatly affected, and grasses shot up in meadows, with Meadow Foxtail currently the tallest, often surrounded by shorter Sweet Vernal Grass. The uniquely cut flowers of Ragged Robin could be found in damp places.

One of the last and most elusive of the migrant bird species was reported this week: Honey Buzzards. They are rare: only 20 pairs are thought to have nested in Sussex last year, but they do occur regularly in a couple of local sites. Despite the name, they feed principally on wasp larvae, and not on honeybee nests. Another migrant raptor, the Hobby, was reported at Woolmer Pond, with a flock of Sand Martins that were its potential prey.

Following last week's report of Wood White butterflies in Chiddingfold Forest, we were alerted to a new site for the species in a village garden: it does appear to be spreading. Otherwise, the conditions made it a poor week for insects. Nocturnal moths were particularly sparse, but sunny spells did encourage some interesting day-flying species: the uncommon longhorn micro-moth *Cauchas rufimitrella* (on Garlic Mustard and Cuckooflower in meadows), *Ancylis badiana* (distinctively marked), *Phyllonorycter trifasciella* ("Banded Honeysuckle Leaf-miner", a nice shade of dusky pink), and Mother Shipton (supposedly with a profile of a stereotypical witch, and named after the legendary Knaresborough character!). Some rescued eggs of a Common Quaker moth produced caterpillars that were reared on bramble leaves and are now pupating: they are due to stay in that state until early next year. Two unusual flies found this week were the Grey-backed Snout, which is an atypical hoverfly with a protruding proboscis, and *Peplomyza litura*, which rests with its wings held roof-like, rather than flat and overlapping as in other flies.

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Photos: Ragged Robin (by A. Swan); Wood White in garden (by J. Murray); Mother Shipton (by M. Tomsett); Banded Honeysuckle Leaf-miner (by A. Swan); Small Copper (by M. Tomsett); the micro-moth *Ancylis badiana* (by M. Tomsett); Grey-backed Snout hoverfly (by M. Tomsett); the longhorn micro-moth *Cauchas rufimitrella* (by A. Swan); the fly *Peplomyza litura* (by A. Swan); Nuthatch at nest hole (by A. Swan); the click beetle *Denticollis linearis* (by A. Swan); Common Quaker adult with eggs; caterpillar; caterpillars pupating (by T. Hardy).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 24/5/26.

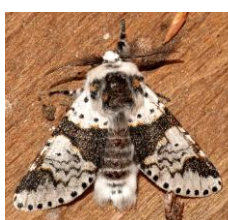
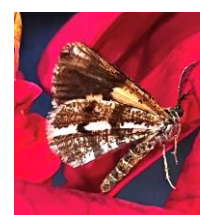
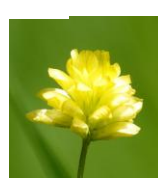
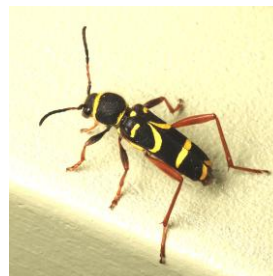
The change in the weather was amazing to experience: below average temperatures at the beginning of the week gradually climbed to a record-breaking heatwave at the end. As there was still moisture in the soil, our rough grasslands became awash with colour, with rusty patches of Sheep's Sorrel, sky-blue drifts of Germander Speedwell and the misty blue of Heath Speedwell, all spangled with the yellows of cinquefoils, trefoils and buttercups. The sprawling Creeping Buttercup is the familiar garden weed, but much smarter are the tall Meadow Buttercup (in damp meadows) and the short-stemmed Bulbous Buttercup (on sandy and chalky soils), the latter being easily distinguished by the reflexed (down-turned) sepals below the yellow petals.

Insects rapidly made up for lost time. May is perhaps the best month for beetles: a diverse selection from this week includes the Wasp Beetle, Green Tortoise Beetle, Cream-spot Ladybird (for which the scientific name includes the Latin for 14 spots: *Calvia quatuordecimguttata*!), and the rare fungus beetle *Diaperis boleti*. Uncommon moths included Bordered White, Figure of 80, *Elachista argentella* and, best of all, the Cream-spot Tiger, which is very rare away from coasts. Curiously, its larval food plants are not really coastal species, so perhaps it is frost-sensitive. Chalcidoid wasps are mostly tiny (1-3mm), but a giant (at 6.5mm) was found this week: *Perilampus ruficornis*. This belongs to a group that are hyper-parasitoids: they parasitise larvae of ichneumons and tachinid flies that themselves parasitise caterpillars: they do this by having highly mobile larvae that seek out their prey.

There were reports of Honey Buzzards, Goshawks and Hawfinches at a site to the south-west of the town. Swifts were reported from more villages and in greater numbers, presumably enjoying the bounty of insects. An Adder found during a reptile survey was alarmingly lively: it was probably either the warm weather or being gravid that caused the departure from their normal very shy and recessive nature. Dog walkers should take care to keep their pets close in heathy areas.

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

Photos: Cream-spot Tiger (by M. Tomsett); Adder (by V. Carter); Wasp Beetle (by A. Swan); Green Tortoise Beetle (by A. Swan); Cream-spot Ladybird (by T. Hardy); Bordered White (by T. Hardy); *Diaperis boleti* (by M. Tomsett); *Elachista argentella* (by A. Swan); Pebble Hook-tip (by A. Swan); the micro-wasp *Perilampus ruficornis* (by A. Swan); Hop Trefoil (by Andy Swan); Bulbous Buttercup (showing reflexed sepals) (by A. Swan); Figure of 80 (by A. Swan); Alder Kitten (by A. Swan); Creeping Cinquefoil (by A. Swan); nymph of Speckled Bush-cricket (by A. Swan); Large Red Damselfly – mating pair (by J. Godden).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 31/5/26.

The drift of warm air from the south that produced sweltering conditions also delivered samples of insect life from the continent: in addition to many more Painted Lady butterflies, there were large numbers of migrant day-flying Silver-Y moths, along with a remarkable influx of rare Striped Hawkmoths. Although the clear moonlit nights weren't ideal for nocturnal moths, a good range was recorded, including the giant Privet Hawkmoth, and the pink Small Elephant Hawkmoth. One of the most distinctive of micro-moths could be found flying by day or around lights at night: *Alabonia geoffrella*, known to moth enthusiasts as "Geoff"!

The Society's visit to a local private wildflower meadow coincided with the opening of flower spikes of Southern Marsh-orchids and Common Spotted-orchids. These have not prospered in recent years, probably due to dry springs, so it will be interesting to see how they show this year on our meadows and commons. The group took a detour to view a patch of the rare Bird's-nest Orchid; this has also been declining recently, and there were only two flower spikes to view. This plant has no leaves or chlorophyll, and gains all of its nutrients from the soil via a fungus, so it is no surprise if it suffers in dry seasons.

The relationships between plants and specialist insects was a feature of the visit to the meadow: Dock Leaf Beetles were found on dock leaves, the metallic leaf beetle *Plateumaris sericea* was only on Yellow Flag, two species of picture-winged fly were specialists on Lesser Burdock, and two species of weevil on Common Figwort. The latter included *Cionus hortulus*, which has a mark on its elytra so densely black that it looks like a hole! Elsewhere, an abundance of insects included Dusky Cockroach (a UK native and harmless) and the bug *Closterotomus trivialis*, which is now quite widespread, but first arrived in the UK as recently as 2009.

The bird of the week was a rare and handsome Woodchat Shrike reported from Ambersham Common – the northerly migration of this species from Africa should have stopped in southern Europe. Nightjars have been heard churring at Woolmer Forest (including during the day) and Ludshott Common, where the National Trust offer evening Nightjar walks.

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

Photos: Common Spotted-orchid (by A. Swan); Southern Marsh-orchid (by V. Carter); Bird's-nest Orchid (by V. Carter); Privet Hawkmoth (by M. Tomsett); Red-and-Black Froghopper (by V. Carter); Green Silver-lines (by M. Tomsett); Dusky Cockroach (by J. Godden); Small Elephant Hawkmoth (by T. Hardy); Green Carpet (by T. Hardy); Peach Blossom (by M. Tomsett); *Alabonia geoffrella* (by A. Swan); flower of Common Figwort (by A. Swan); the weevil *Cionus hortulus* (by A. Swan); mating pair of the weevil *Cionus scrophulariae* (by A. Swan); *Closterotomus trivialis* (by J. Godden); the bee-mimic hoverfly *Merodon equestris* (by J. Godden).

