

Wildlife News

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

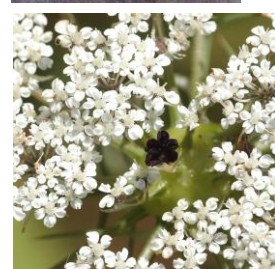
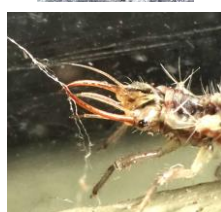
There has been an increase in noticeable bird life in our woodlands, with Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers both to be heard in treetops, although often unseen. Chiffchaffs are calling, presumably to keep in contact with their new families, with a single rising note, but their characteristic onomatopoeic song, as heard in spring, hasn't been much used. In contrast, the spring song of Willow Warblers has been heard reprised in several places, albeit often in a desultory way. These birds are probably migrants on their way back south, as are the Spotted Flycatchers that have just begun to be seen locally. There is a suggestion that Kingfishers are currently easier to see than usual, perhaps because they are concentrated in larger bodies of water, as smaller streams and ponds are diminished in the drought. Green Woodpeckers have been heard on almost every walk in woodland and heath: their preferred food - ants - is presumably as abundant as ever. Also noisy are Common Buzzards, who are at their most vociferous, as youngsters are learning life skills in family groups.

The Society's visit to a part of Witley Common managed for reptiles yielded no sightings: reptiles tend to be seen when they are out in the open to warm-up by basking, but that behaviour isn't needed in current conditions! Nevertheless, it was good to hear that the site has all three UK native snake species and all three lizards. It is also an excellent site for heathland insects: sand wasps and nomad bees were seen. Alarming, the heather was beginning to turn brown in places. The umbellifers seem to be quite resilient in the current conditions, with Hogweed still looking fresh along waysides, plus Wild Angelica in damp places. Where the soil is dry and has higher pH, Wild Carrot and Wild Parsnip (yellow-green flowers) are conspicuous, and the feathery Fennel (a non-native) occurs in suburban settings. A curiosity of Wild Carrots is that each umbel of hundreds of white flowers includes a single pink/purple flower in the centre, varying from pale pink to almost black.

The term "ruby-tailed wasp", as applied to the metallic cuckoo wasps, fails in the case of *Trichrysis cyanea*, which is the only UK species that is completely blue-green: one of these small wasps was found this week. Other unusual insects included the ichneumon *Aritranis director* and a scary (when enlarged) predatory larva of a lacewing. The uncommon Green Crab Spider was found on Hogweed, seeking to ambush nectaring insects; the white or pink Flower Crab Spider are much more frequent in this situation. Highlights among a slightly improved set of moths were the Poplar Hawkmoth (which is continuing to be strong through its long season) and the uncommon Straw Underwing and Maple Prominent.

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

Photos: Poplar Hawkmoth (by T. Hardy); the ichneumon *Aritranis director* (by J. Godden); Green Crab Spider (by A. Swan); the cuckoo wasp *Trichrysis cyanea* (by A. Swan); Kingfisher (by A. Swan); Straw Underwing (by M. Tomsett); Maple Prominent (by T. Hardy); September Thorn (by T. Hardy); lacewing larva (2 photos) (by A. Swan); Wild Carrot umbel (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 9/8/26.

Throughout the three-week period of Butterfly Conservation's national survey (the "Big Butterfly Count"), there have been large numbers of Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns, Small Whites and Large Whites everywhere, plus Painted Ladies concentrated locally and Holly Blues seen much more frequently than usual. The total numbers of butterflies look to be about four times greater than last year, when the weather was relatively dull. The Painted Ladies are migrants from the south, and they are not alone: there have been many migrant moths this season, of which the Bordered Straw was a good example this week; and migrant dragonflies, including the Red-veined Darter seen this week at Woolmer Pond.

The outstanding bird report was also at Woolmer Pond. This site is consistently used by Hobbies hunting dragonflies, but a trespassing Peregrine on the same patch was seen being chased off by a Hobby! Otherwise, the most noticeable birds of the week were the large number of Chiffchaffs calling, and occasionally singing, from birch trees on our commons and open woodlands. The Oystercatcher reported at Thursley Common – very unusual at that site – may have been taking advantage of the extensive feeding grounds offered by the peaty mud exposed by the continuing drought. Unfortunately, this exposure will lead to oxidation of the peat and the release of more carbon dioxide (as with the thawing of the tundra, but on a much smaller scale). A Marsh Harrier and a Great Egret were also reported here, and Green Sandpipers from several places.

Fresh flowering plants are few and far between in our increasingly parched landscape, but Goldenrod is an attractive feature of heathy places: it is much neater than its relatives the ragworts. Common Hemp-nettle and Corn Mint are also among the late flowerers that are tolerating the weather; both are declining species that were formerly very common.

In addition to the Bordered Straw already mentioned, the uncommon or attractive moths found this week included Bulrush Wainscot, Sallow Kitten, Scorched Wing and the peculiar micro-moth *Mompha propinquella*. The Scorched Wing is a particularly interesting record, as this is principally a June moth, and this occurrence must surely be a sign of a second generation being produced in the same year, thanks to favourable conditions for the first generation. The addition of extra generations in one year is one of the responses to a warming climate. Warm nights can encourage insects to enter the house through open windows, among the most surprising of which is the Oak Bush-cricket, a gangly insect with very long antennae, most often found on ceilings!

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Photos: Holly Blue (by M. Tomsett); Painted Lady (by A. Swan); Grayling (by A. Swan); Sallow Kitten (by T. Hardy); Goldenrod (by A. Swan); Common Hemp-nettle (by A. Swan); Oak Bush-cricket (by A. Swan); Chinese Character (by A. Swan); Scorched Wing (by T. Hardy); the micro-moth *Mompha propinquella* (by A. Swan); Bulrush Wainscot (by A. Swan); Bordered Straw (by A. Swan).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 16/8/26.

An insect with a unique trick was found this week: when the Bombardier Beetle (*Bachinus crepitans*) is attacked, it explodes a hot puff of vapour from its rear end! It produces hydroquinone and hydrogen peroxide and stores these in separate sacs; when mixed, an explosive reaction occurs. Unfortunately, the species wasn't immediately recognised, so no experimentation was done! It is not common: there is no prior record of the species in our area in the national database.

As the doldrums of the heatwave and drought dragged on, there was little to report except insect activity. As Hogweed declined as a nectar source, there were concentrations of insects on the flowers of aromatic herbs such as mints and Marjoram: these are drought-resistant. Also, the nights around the spectacular eclipse were effectively moonless, and the first cloudy skies for many weeks enhanced the darkness of the night sky, so nocturnal insects were encouraged to emerge in good numbers. Prominent among the insect finds this week were bugs. Although this term is used casually for any insect, an entomological bug, or "true bug", is a member of the Heteroptera (shieldbugs, plant bugs etc.) or Homoptera (leafhoppers, aphids etc.). The violin-shaped shieldbugs, such as the Hawthorn Shieldbug, were abundant, and the distinctive coppery mark on the Woundwort Shieldbug was noticed. Two of our largest leafhoppers were found: the first Rhododendron Leafhopper of the season, and the remarkable Eared Leafhopper, which is the only UK member of a mainly tropical group. Uncommon species included *Lamprotettix nitidulus* (which has a marking like a cartoon frog face) and *Acericerus ribauti*.

The many moths attracted to light were mostly common species, but the Birch Mocha and Yellow Shell were especially appreciated. Several Jersey Tigers appeared, but we still have fewer of this species than places further east or west: the London and Southampton areas are sources of its geographical spread. Accompanying the moths was another huge Tanner Beetle (seen more than usual this season) and a Southern Oak Bush-cricket. Last week we reported an Oak Bush-cricket; the Southern Oak Bush-cricket is similar but is wingless even as an adult. It is less common but has been spreading northwards in recent years.

In a week of few bird reports, there was a steady increase in the number of sightings of Green Sandpipers and Spotted Flycatchers, both in passage southwards towards over-wintering in Africa: they are apparently not confused by the weather!

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Photos: Jersey Tigers (by M. Tomsett); Rhododendron Leafhopper (by A. Swan); Bombardier Beetle (by A. Swan); Eared Leafhopper (by T. Hardy); the leafhopper *Lamprotettix nitidulus* (by A. Swan); the leafhopper *Acericerus ribauti* (by A. Swan); Woundwort Shieldbug (by A. Swan); Birch Mocha (by A. Swan); Comfrey Ermine (by T. Hardy); Southern Oak Bush-cricket (by A. Swan); Tanner Beetle (by M. Tomsett); Yellow Shell (by T. Hardy); September Thorn (by M. Tomsett).



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 23/8/26.

The heatwave finally came to an end; not with the traditional thunderstorm, but with showers of drizzle. Though very welcome, this didn't constitute the end of the drought, and we still need to be anxious about our heathlands. We were expecting the chalk downland flora to be dry for the Society's visit to Levin Down (Singleton), and indeed most plants were shrivelled, but there were some flowers – especially Small Scabious – that were attracting butterflies, which were the main target of the visit. There were exceptional numbers of Clouded Yellows, making this a memorable year for this migrant. Small Heaths, Small Coppers and Common Blues were all in good numbers, and the uncommon day-flying moth Wavy-barred Sable was a treat. The leafless and rootless plant Dodder was found, parasitising knapweed and Marjoram – in our area, Dodder can be found on heathland, where it is hosted by gorse and heather. The cow pats produced by the cows grazing on Levin Down were teeming with rove and dung beetles. This is a rare sight these days, as in other settings dairy cattle are usually so heavily dosed with insecticides that their droppings are toxic for beetles, and normal recycling of nutrients is prevented.

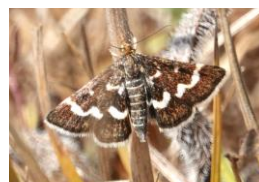
At Singleton, a Kestrel was observed trying to pick off House Martins from a large flock, but unsuccessfully: Hobbies are specialists at this, and they may be seen at this time of year chasing dragonflies as well as hirundines. Martins have been reported accumulating in large numbers at the coast, and other birds reported passing through our area this week on the way south included Yellow Wagtails, Whinchats, Wheatears and Spotted Flycatchers. Birch trees remained busy with Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers. Three Honey Buzzards were reported at Woolbeding, suggesting successful local breeding of this special bird.

Flowering patches of mint were very popular with flies, especially some distinctive tachinids, and wasps. In a fairly poor week for moths, the highlights were the uncommon Pale Eggar and the first Clifden Nonpareil of the year: a huge and unique insect which has become a regular only in recent years.

In such dry conditions, fungi are not to be expected, but Chicken-of-the-Woods is producing fleshy brackets, as it obtains water from the dead wood it digests. Also, a fungus was found indoors: a dead fly on a window looked a little like a wasp, but the pale bands on its abdomen were in fact a fungus: *Entomophthora muscae*. This killed the fly, but only after inducing it to perch on a place suitable for spore dispersal, then the fungal tissues expanded and pushed the abdominal segments apart.

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Photos (by A. Swan except where indicated): Willow Warbler; Clifden Nonpareil (by M. Tomsett); the tachinid fly *Ectophasia crassipennis*; the tachinid fly *Tachina fera*; Dodder; Acorn Weevil; Rosy Rustic (by T. Hardy); the dung beetle *Sphaeridium scarabaeoides*; Clouded Yellow; Pale Eggar (by M. Tomsett); the picture-wing fly *Dioxina bidentis*; Wavy-barred Sable; fly infested with the fungus *Entomophthora muscae*.



Wildlife News

Observations in the Haslemere area - week ending 30/8/26.

At last, the drought was ended by some proper rainfall, and within 24 hours there was a green flush to lawns – grass is very resilient. It will be interesting to see the response from other plants: summer flowering species may try to make up for lost time and flower late; some spring-flowering species may flower again, mistaking the drought for winter (this has happened increasingly often in recent years); and many plants of some species may have died and may take years to recoup. The most persistent flowerers through the drought have been members of the Lamiaceae (mints and other aromatic herbs) and Asteraceae (dandelions, thistles etc.). Two peculiar members of the latter were noted this week: Chicory, with flowers like a blue dandelion, appeared for the first time on a roadside in the town's western suburbs, presumably an "escape" from cultivation; and Carline Thistle, a plant of chalk downland that grows anomalously in a couple of sites in our area that have mostly acidic soils but where chalk has been dumped in the past.

The top bird reports this week were two sightings of Ospreys at the Frensham ponds – these birds are on their way to west Africa. The Great Pond also had a Little Tern. Tice's Meadow (Farnham) continued to produce the goods, with a trio of Sandpipers: Common, Green and Wood.

Moths were moderately lively, with the most surprising find being *Ancylosis oblitella*, which has the new English name "Saltmarsh Knot-horn", a name that conveys how far away it is from its normal habitat, but apparently it has popped up in a lot of new places this year. Also notable were the uncommon Barred Hook-tip, Hedge Rustic, Small Blood-vein and the curiously marked *Evergestis limbata*. The latter, which has the new name "Dark-bordered Pearl", was formerly such a special find that it was chosen as the emblem of the Sussex Moth Group, but it has increased 10-fold in the last 15 years and is now a regular.

Flowering mints generated concentrations of insects: the digger wasp *Cerceris rybyensis* and more than one species of blood bee were noticed this week. Leafhopper bugs are starting to increase in numbers: September is a good month for them. It didn't take long after the rain for the first bolete fungus to emerge: a slug-damaged Rooting Bolete (*Caloboletus radicans*), but this was the exception. It is often said that rain after a heatwave is a good recipe for fungal fruiting, but perhaps this year the drought was too damaging.

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Photos: Chicory (by A. Swan); the moth *Evergestis limbata* (by M. Tomsett); blood bee *Sphecodes* sp. (by A. Swan); the leafhopper *Eupteryx florida* (by A. Swan); Hedge Rustic (by A. Swan); Barred Hook-tip (by T. Hardy); Treble-bar (by M. Tomsett); *Ancylosis oblitella* (by A. Swan); the micro-moth the digger wasp *Cerceris rybyensis* (by A. Swan); Mint Leaf Beetle (by A. Swan); Small Blood-vein (by M. Tomsett); Scalloped Hook-tip (by M. Tomsett); Speckled Wood (by M. Tomsett); Carline Thistle (by A. Swan).

