

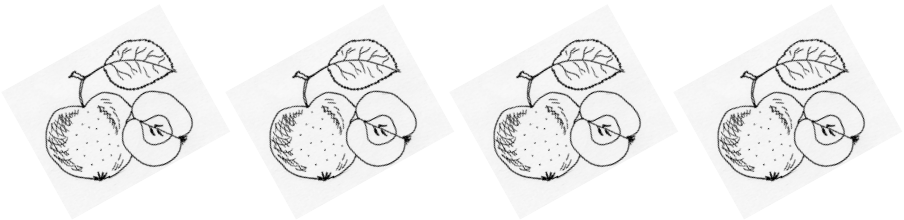


Supporting:

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
The Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland The British Trust for Ornithology  
The Yorkshire Naturalists' Union The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust  
Butterfly Conservation The British Dragonfly Society

Registered Charity No. 503860

## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2020



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a difference six months has made! Little did I realise when I wrote in the Spring that Covid-19 would have such an impact on our lives and our Society. I do hope that none of our members have succumbed to the virus and that we can all succeed in avoiding infection over the coming months. The efforts to control the pandemic have of course hit the Society badly. We managed to hold only a few of our field trips before gatherings were limited and we have cancelled our entire series of winter talks. That hasn't prevented members getting out into the field, as can be seen from the many sightings reported on our website. Some of us kept 'lockdown lists' of wildlife in our gardens: I was delighted to see as many as 50 species of birds in or over our garden during that time. We also saw a good number of butterflies and dragonflies this year, so perhaps the hot Spring favoured the insects for once.

Although our programme of events has been cancelled, we can still function on-line. The Harrogate Naturalists' Forum on Facebook and our website both give you the opportunity to share your observations and wildlife news. I hope that the new section of the website describing some of the great wildlife locations in our area has inspired you to visit new places. We now have the ability also to add members' photographs to the pages describing those locations, and to add new locations of interest. Our gallery of members' photos is growing too, with some excellent images submitted recently. So, if you do have any photos to share, or favourite places in our area that are not already included on the website, please do let me know.

You will likely have heard of Zoom, the video conferencing system. We have been using it successfully to continue our meetings of Council during lockdown and are considering using Zoom to relay some of our Winter lectures to members. It is really easy to set up and use on a tablet or computer, the presenters can show their slides and the audience can raise questions through the chat feature, to be answered by the presenters after their talk. Apart from socialising before and after the lecture, this is just like an indoor meeting. Watch out for announcements by email and on the website about this and other ways we are trying to support members in this difficult time.

**Nick Gaunt**

## **WINTER 2020 TO 2021 – LECTURES AND FIELD TRIPS**

Most regretfully, we have decided to cancel all of the winter's lectures. There seems little prospect that a large number of us, mainly of a vulnerable age, could gather in the St Robert Centre in the foreseeable future. Many of our lecturers have agreed to be contacted again next year; in the meantime Council are working on plans to produce some Zoom video talks by our own members, many of whom were down to talk this year in any case. Please keep checking the website for news of this.

Outdoor field trips have been running successfully, and two autumn trips (Staveley, Hartlepool) have gone ahead with some extra Covid precautions. However, given the recent developments in social distancing, we have decided to abandon plans for more organised field trips for the time being. The Fungus Foray on 17 October has had to be cancelled. If and when the situation improves, some events may be arranged at short notice; again, check the website for updates.

This is all very disappointing, but probably not a surprise to anybody. Hopefully we will still be getting out into the countryside to enjoy the autumn migration, winter visitors, rain, mud, darkness ....!

**Muff Upsall**

### **FIELD TRIP REPORTS 2020**

#### **WILD FLOWERS OF HAY-A-PARK      4 July 2020**

There was a sense of excitement at the start of our event due to the fact that we had been locked down for the previous three months and this was our first HDNS outing of the year. At last we were out of doors, meeting others and going to find new plants (hopefully). We were limited to five members plus leader Kevin Walker, and because the event was oversubscribed, a big thank you to those members who gave up their places for us.

Our excitement was so real that we seemed to spend a disproportionate amount of time at the outset looking at the plants which were on the grass beside our parked cars. The first was Dove's-foot Crane's-bill, *Geranium molle*.

Then we found Smooth Hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris* and Cat's-ear, *Hypochaeris radicata* with its warty leaves. These dandelion-type plants are notoriously difficult to identify but we were undeterred (probably due to our previous period of deprivation).

Then it was time to get going into our designated site. Kevin's plan was to explore the area at the southern end of Hay a Park lake and then continue along its east side. The site has been largely undisturbed since the completion of gravel extraction in the early 1970s. It is now a designated SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). As soon as we were on the path, it became apparent that we were surrounded by very interesting rough grassland, with a plentiful supply of common spotted orchids. We came across many different grasses, sedges and rushes, which for some of us require patience to identify and remember.

The first grasses we spotted included Rough Meadow-grass *Poa trivialis*, Spreading Meadow-grass *Poa humilis*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*. In some instances, Kevin patiently drew diagrams for us, for example to illustrate the difference in the spikelets of Meadow Foxtail and Timothy Grass. No botany event should omit the Apiaceae, so we did a quick scan of some plants in flower ie. Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, Upright Hedge-parsley *Torilis japonica* and Rough Chervil *Chaerophyllum temulum*.

After passing through lovely glades of Goat Willow and Osier, the weather became warmer and warmer, so we were glad to reach the lakeside's edge to view the water plants. For me, the most exciting plant on the day was the sight of Water Soldier *Stratiotes aloides* in the lake. This plant is submerged except at flowering time, when rosettes of spine-toothed lanceolate leaves rise to the surface to reveal 3-petalled white flowers. Also as a bonus, close by was Fringed Water-lily, *Nymphoides peltata*. Both these plants are natives, although it is possible that they may have been introduced into this location. At mid-point on the east side we looked across the lake to the Bar Lane area, where various planning applications have been lodged. Fortunately, the discussion about these was only brief and we were mostly able to forget that these new housing developments would be very close to the SSSI. In any case on reaching the limestone area we got distracted in our search for Bee orchids in flower, but were sadly unsuccessful.

HDNS members got their priorities right on the day. It was 4th July – and we were not celebrating American Independence Day; nor were we drinking in pubs; nor were we visiting hairdressers. We chose, instead, to botanise in a very special place. As usual, our thanks to Kevin Walker, our leader and to Muff Upsall, our organiser.

**Sonia Starbuck**

## **TREES OF ROUNDHAY PARK**

**14 July 2020**

The HDNS members who met at Roundhay Park were so fortunate to have two very knowledgeable leaders for the morning's guided tree walk, Alan Hunton and John Killingbeck. They had planned two different walks and each group had a session with each of these enthusiastic leaders. Our walks were mainly in the central area, with views of the 2 lakes. Roundhay Park is 700 acres and one of the biggest city parks in Europe, allowing plenty of space for a large collection of native and non-native trees. Many of these trees have reached an age or a size which will put them into a category of Champion, Veteran or Ancient.

Before setting off, Alan briefly explained to our group about the Ancient Tree Inventory, encouraging us to consider contributing to this in the future. You can be sure that on his walks he will be carrying his trusty tape measure, in order to record the girth of a likely candidate, and a high tech clinometer to record its height.

During the walk Alan gave many tips that would improve our tree ID skills. We know we can read the books but the trouble is that hybrids occur. Stopping to look at a Pedunculate Oak, with acorns growing on stalks, we then find that the leaf has a stalk, slightly more than the 10mm given in the book.

By the end of these 2 walks we had undoubtedly learnt a lot from Alan and John. Each leader made our morning so enjoyable through their knowledge and their enthusiasm. Our thanks go to Alan and John, and to Muff for organising this trip.

**Kerry Morrison**

## **SOUTH GARE**

**6 August 2020**

After months of Covid uncertainty, this was a much-anticipated trip. It was pleasantly warm and the twelve of us were feeling optimistic as we met up with our leader, David Barlow, the Vice-County recorder, whose knowledge of South Gare is phenomenal.

South Gare is a unique area; it is approximately 2 square kilometres of reclaimed land comprising lime-rich blast furnace slag and river dredgings, with accumulated sand dunes and slacks in places. It provides a variety of habitats, mainly dry, basic and nutrient poor, supporting a huge variety of plants which would not survive competition. Walking over the ground, it is often noticed that there is vegetation everywhere but none of this is grass – quite often the ground is covered in lichen. Apparently, botanists have failed to find a classification for this habitat – according to David the nearest would be “desert”! There is an astonishing species count of over 600 for the site.

We were 5 weeks later than last year's visit and so, instead of a profusion of showy coloured flowers, we were treated to a day of esoteric rarities, unusual hybrids and misplaced curiosities. And quite a few colourful flowers for good measure! Only the highlights will be referred to here – for the complete plant list and for the scientific names, please see the website.

We started with a fascinating ramble along the bank behind the so-called Marina, a jumble of boats, huts and an extraordinary mix of rubbish – from hearth-brushes and empty tins to white goods! In amongst the human detritus we found Sea Couch and Sand Couch, the latter identifiable by the audible 'snap' when the stem is broken. Here also were several ragwort species, including the new arrival "narrow leaved ragwort" which none of us had seen before. Despite David giving us lots of clues we all failed on Annual Sea-blite. There were several species of the *Atriplex* (Orache) genus, and the distinctive very common Sea Sandwort. An old friend from last year was the Duke of Argyll tea tree!

Moving down on to the 'shore' we encountered many more treats. A speciality was the Uig Hawkweed, burdened with the scientific name *Hieracium uiginskyensis*. Clearly this belongs in Uig; unlike many known introductions this apparently made its own way to South Gare – perhaps by boat? David showed us how to identify it by the hairs on the phyllaries. It is an example of many plants here which are far from their usual location. Another rarity was the hybrid orache *Atriplex prostrata* x *littoralis*. I think some of us were beginning to think Oraches were a little lacking in charisma...

There were many more fascinating plants to see as we ambled over coarse sand and among dunes – Proliferous Pink was a tiny gem; Prickly Saltwort was – well, prickly. And mainly green. Somehow, David went straight to the spot where he was able to show us Lesser Centaury and Sea Milkwort. Both were about the size of a pin, with their flower slightly smaller than a pinhead. The photographers were soon stretched out flat on the ground attempting to do justice to them.

Damper patches supported various sedges and rushes, beautiful Lyme Grass and Marram decorated the looser dunes – so well adapted to their dry, unstable, salty environment. Then to a particular favourite – Sea Holly, in full flower and delicately suffused with purple, very unlike the rest of its family, the Apiaceae.

David was determined we should not miss anything so we finished with visits to two more sites – a pool containing Horned Pondweed and the rare and strong-smelling Hart's Pennyroyal, then a roadside bank with Wild Clary and the pretty Tunic Flower.

How stimulating it was to visit a new habitat, and be shown so many plants which can't be found in our own district! Looking at our plant list for the day, a sizeable proportion were 'firsts' for all of us. I hope David won't expect us to

remember their names next year... Many thanks to him for giving his time so generously, and to Kerry for organising it.

**Muff Upsall**

## **NOSTERFIELD AND LINGHAM COMPLEX**

**1 September 2020**

After days of poor weather, we were lucky to have such a pleasant one when we met at Nosterfield Reserve at 1 p.m. Passage waders to be found on the Reserve were a single Ruff, four Dunlins and lots of Curlews which were arriving for the winter, with 120 counted. Canada and Greylag Geese were numerous with Shoveler, Gadwall and many Wigeon and Teal seen, while Swallows, Sand and House Martins were overhead. In an attempt to add more species to our list, we took the track to the North Hide hoping for passerines, which were skulking in the bushes and so Robin, Wren and Goldfinch were heard but not seen, while Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps gave fleeting glimpses as they flew across the track; it was extremely quiet but, at last a Kestrel gave good views. We duly found the Wheatear, the species we were hoping to see having been told earlier that one was near the North Hide. On our return to the car park, four Common Buzzards were seen high overhead.

Lingham was our next destination, though this lake has lost some of its appeal since the washing of sand and gravel has ceased, making the shorelines less suitable for waders as they have now vegetated over. Great Crested and Little Grebes were present, with at least 12 of the former. A single Goldeneye, an early winter visitor, was found along with the Shelduck. A party of Long-tailed Tits flew over the viewing area – at least we saw those. We made our way over the fields towards Flasks Lake hoping for Little Owl, which was heard but not seen. The small Kiln Lake could have had anything on it, but the views were obstructed by trees and bushes, which was rather frustrating. A JCB was working on the reed bed and, as you do, we enquired as to what they were doing. They were removing silt to widen the channels in order to keep them open, and the material they removed is to be used to create a wader habitat on the edge of Flasks Lake. We had a brief view of a Hobby which was probably chasing Swallows.

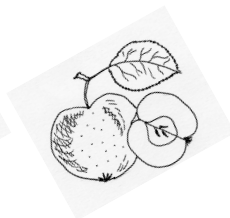
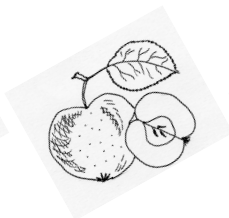
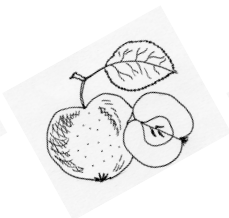
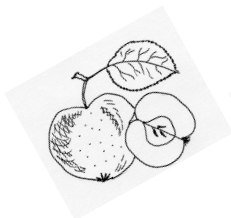
We ended our visit at 4.30 p.m. having spent a very pleasant afternoon that had given us the chance to meet up with other members during these difficult times and in such good weather. Two of the group decided to return to Nosterfield in the hope of finding other species but the only new one they saw was a Bar-headed Goose. A total of 50 species was recorded on the day, an excellent result for the time spent.

**June E. Atkinson**

## NOSTERFIELD, LINGHAM AND FLASKS LAKE 1 September 2020

Canada Goose		Black-headed Gull	
Greylag Goose		Common Gull	1 at Nosterfield
Mute Swan		Lesser Black-backed Gull	8
Shelduck	Lingham	Herring Gull	Nosterfield
Shoveler		Kestrel	Nosterfield
Gadwall		Magpie	
Wigeon	Nosterfield	Jackdaw	
Mallard		Rook	Nosterfield
Teal	Nosterfield	Carrion Crow	
Tufted Duck		Blue Tit	Nosterfield
Goldeneye	Lingham	Long-tailed Tit	Lingham
Little Grebe		Sand Martin	Nosterfield
Great Crested Grebe	10	Swallow	Nosterfield, Lingham
Grey Heron	Nosterfield	House Martin	Nosterfield
Little Egret		Chiffchaff	Nosterfield
Cormorant	Lingham	Blackcap	Nosterfield
Sparrowhawk	Nosterfield	Starling	Nosterfield
Common Buzzard	4 at	Blackbird	Nosterfield
Nosterfield		Mistle Thrush	1 at Lingham
Hobby	Flask	Robin	Nosterfield
Moorhen		Pied Wagtail	Lingham
Coot		Chaffinch	Nosterfield
Lapwing	Nosterfield	Goldfinch	Nosterfield
Ruff	one at Nosterfield	Wheatear	Nosterfield
Curlew	120	House Sparrow	1 in Tanfield
Dunlin	4		village.

**50 species**





## **SWIFTS**

You may be interested in the update on a very late pair of swifts which are continuing to rear young at Masham Church (see below). Hopefully the youngster may have successfully fledged by the time of your newsletter. I wonder if swifts are likely to extend their stay with us over the coming years as a result of climate change? (despite the cold August!).

## **WATER VOLES**

Another snippet from Timble Ings (woodland plantation just outside HDNS area) – Yorks Water are looking to re-introduce water voles. I wonder when the last verified records occurred in Harrogate District? The last I recorded were along the Ure at Dunsforth over 10 years ago (they may still be there) and hopefully with mink seeming to have declined (perhaps associated with the recovery of otter numbers) “ratty” may have a chance of getting re-established.

**Dan McAndrew, Principal Ecologist, Harrogate Borough Council**

## **THE PREDATORY BIRD MONITORING SCHEME**

We all know that birds of prey in our area can suffer persecution. Many of us will be out and about in the countryside and may by chance come across a dead raptor. If you are able to remove the corpse safely the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology runs a Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme. It will carry out a post mortem to establish the cause of death. They can be contacted by email on [epot@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:epot@ceh.ac.uk) or via their website at <http://pbms.ceh.ac.uk/> They will send you suitable packaging so you can forward the bird to them free of charge. They will also let you know the results of their investigation. It is vital that proper evidence is obtained to prove the cause of death of our raptors so please consider using this scheme.”

**Stephen Root, Ornithology Recorder**

Stephen also asks for members to send him photos for the 2019 and 2020 Annual Bird Reports.

## **LOCKDOWN ENCOUNTERS**

Way back in 1972, I had just completed my O levels, which meant an early start to the school summer holiday. “Make the most of this,” one of the teachers said, “because it might be the longest holiday you will get until you retire.” He obviously hadn’t reckoned on Coronavirus!

While taking the necessary precautions while furloughed for 3 months, I had no intention of wrapping myself up in cotton wool and doing nothing. The new HDNS website was under development, and this was an opportunity to visit a few local wildlife sites – those that were within walking distance – so that I could take photographs and contribute some factual information. It was all done in the name of exercise, although to be honest, some of my excursions stretched to rather more than the permitted 1 hour!

On a day of glorious April sunshine, I set off for Hookstone Woods, spotting my first Orange Tip of the year on route. Arriving at the ponds, I stopped in my tracks...at the water's edge, only a few yards away, was a magnificent heron. Although it seemed slightly on edge, it made no attempt to fly off. I can only assume that it had learnt that human activity posed no threat (lots of dog walkers pass through the woods). The camera was quickly readied and I actually got close enough to take some head and neck portraits; with the sun shining from a perfect angle, all the detail of the plumage, the bill and the glint in the eye was captured and recorded.

I saw the same bird on several subsequent occasions, usually stalking sticklebacks in the pond margins. Another resident of the pond that I stumbled across was a turtle – obviously an unwanted pet that had been abandoned. It seemed quite at home, sunning itself on the bank.

Towards the end of May, I returned. There was no heron on this occasion, but I did hear the repeated calls of Great-spotted Woodpeckers. A couple of children and their father seemed to be taking particular interest in a certain Scots Pine, so I wandered over to investigate. "You might never see this again," the father said to his offspring, pointing to a nest hole around 20 feet up the trunk, from which a very vocal young woodpecker was poking its head and pleading for food. The adults returned at intervals, beaks crammed with of grubs, and whenever they were near, the pleading of the young bird became intensified. It was another excellent photo opportunity.

Within a few days the young woodpecker had fledged, but I did find a second nest elsewhere in the wood, which was still occupied. Woodpecker nests are easy to locate – you just follow the noise!

Shortly after my first visit to Hookstone, I headed for Rossett Nature Reserve. Despite living only a mile away, I had never previously set eyes on the place. Upon arrival, the first thing I saw was another heron, standing statuesque among the Broad-leaved Pondweed. It was so still that I had to watch for a minute or two, just to be sure that it wasn't one of those ornamental herons that people sometimes put in garden ponds. I wondered if it might be the same bird that I had spotted at Hookstone, but my photographs suggested otherwise.

The display boards at Rossett claim that the pools hold no fish, but my observations confirmed that there is a thriving population of sticklebacks,

which seemed to be the principal prey of the heron. I also saw newts taken and on one occasion, a large dragonfly nymph.

In one of the pools, I observed three small Rudd. This is a species that loves to bask in warm sunshine and as a consequence, is quite easy to spot. The fact that there were only three suggested that they had been introduced – unwanted pets again? I only saw them on one occasion, and suspect that they became heron fodder, as perhaps did three small moorhen chicks, which were briefly present on another pool, before they vanished.

There were many other highlights during my lockdown wanderings, but space does not permit me to detail them all. You certainly don't need to travel far to find plenty of wildlife interest!

**David Tipping**

## MOTHS

Even with “lockdown” and the ensuing restrictions placed upon local travel and meeting fellow moth trappers due to Covid-19, the extraordinary weather during April/early May and again in early autumn, has seen another excellent year for new species in the Society's area, which to date number 13 (12 micros and one macro), so we cannot grumble! All will be detailed in full in the Society's annual report for 2020.

The new micros include: the distinctive *Metalampra italica* at Langthorpe in August, also a first record for Yorkshire – originally found in the UK in Devon in 2003, the species is rapidly spreading north; the second county record (since 1950) of *Xenolechia aethiops* caught at Hutton Conyers on 11th April; ‘mines’ of *Incurvaria pectinea* at Ilton and Smelthouses in June; the fifth Yorkshire records of *Parornix loganella* at Smelthouses on 24th June (a species most common in Scotland) and *Elachista gleichenella* at Ellington Banks on 3rd July; the eighth county record of *Notocelia tetragonana* was at High Batts NR on 31st July, whilst *Coleophora albitarsella* also at the same location on the same date showed a huge range expansion of the species, usually recorded from the extreme south-east of Yorkshire. In the same family, *Coleophora artemisicolella* caught at Hutton Conyers on 25th June was another huge jump in range from the very south of the county, whilst also at Hutton Conyers, *Pempelia palumbella* was trapped on 20th June, a species of lowland heaths (such as Strensall Common), which arrived after a period of easterly winds and *Endothenia nigricostana* was trapped at the same site two days later - a species which has been spreading in the county and been expected in our area. Lastly, feeding on upland mosses, *Bryotropha boreella* at Guisecliffe on 7th August is the most easterly record in Yorkshire and the attractive *Cochylis*

*hybridella* was found at Burton Leonard Lime Quarries (on an unknown date), another recent coloniser of the county, numbers have been building up in south-east Yorkshire, so not unexpected.

The single macro was Fletcher's/Pauper Pug (most appropriate!) caught at Hackfall Woods on 17th June, another first record for Yorkshire. First identified in the UK in the Wye Valley in 1962, the species frequents old woodland with Small-leaved Lime, the nearest known colonies being in Lincolnshire and north Nottinghamshire.

In addition to the new records, other notable macros have included: Devon Carpet at Hackfall Woods and Speckled Yellow at How Stean (both 2nd HDNS records), Sycamore at Hutton Conyers (4th record), Maiden's Blush at Hutton Conyers (5th record), Varied Coronet at Hutton Conyers and Scallop Shell at Smelthouses (8th records), V-moth at Nosterfield NR and Lunar Thorn at Hackfall Woods, both of which are now very rare species in the Society's area. Finally, at High Batts NR on 31st July, both *Acleris notana* and *Gypsonoma aceriana* were new species for VC65.

Migrant species to date have been poorly represented so far. Just three Humming-bird Hawk-moths have been reported and none of the rarer hawk-moths reported elsewhere in the UK, have to our knowledge, been trapped in the Society's area.

Follow us on Twitter: *@JillWarwick* and *@DoubleKidney*

**Jill Warwick & Charlie Fletcher**

## **LONG LANDS COMMON**

This is a new project to create a Community Woodland between Harrogate and Knaresborough. As well as creating a new accessible green space of 30 acres, this new Community Woodland will strengthen the protection of the land between our towns.

Individuals and groups are now being asked to buy shares in Long Lands Common and thereby help fund its creation.

Information regarding the location, the proposed plans and how to buy shares is available via their website [www.longlandscommon.org](http://www.longlandscommon.org) or by leaving a message on the voicemail 01423 560283, or writing to Long Lands Common, 12b Regent Street, Harrogate, HG1 4BE

**Kerry Morrison**

## LOOKING BACK – SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE STATE OF FARMLAND BIRDS IN THE HARROGATE DISTRICT.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020, a fine warm sunny day, we embarked on a non-stop drive (except for a picnic sandwich on the moors at Skell Gill), through Nidderdale as far as Bishopside above Pateley Bridge and back, covering a distance of 60 miles, the purpose being to monitor the birds seen from the moving car and to compare the results with our experiences in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when many more small birds were present in the countryside. The route taken was from Knaresborough to Ripley and Ripon, then passing Fountains Abbey on the B2625 Pateley Bridge road, turning off at Fellbeck onto the road to the moors at Skell Gill, then dropping down to Pateley Bridge, up Greenhow Hill and along Duck Street, returning via Darley, Summerbridge, Hartwith Mill Dam, Ripley and Nidd.

The habitat covered consisted mainly of sheep pasture all along the valley, with some cut hay meadows, the heather moors above Pateley Bridge and along Duck Street, and a few cornfields yet to be harvested in the lower valley. The paucity of small birds was soon obvious, particularly so as post-breeding sparrows and finches, together with their progeny, formerly gathered into flocks and roamed the countryside during July and August and were still evident into September, when they would congregate in the cornfields. The complete absence of any such flocks was clearly indicative of the current desperate state of farmland birds. There were no small passerines at all along the many miles of roadside hedgerows, and the large areas of pasture and meadow held only an occasional Carrion Crow or Jackdaw.

To give some idea of the scale of the decline, comparisons with the period 1960 to the 1990s give a very clear picture of the problem. House Sparrows flocking in cornfields at harvest time regularly numbered 500 to 1,000 birds, and were a common sight as they gathered along the bordering roadside hedgerows to glean in the stubbles. During September and October of the years 1960 and 1961, 6,000 House Sparrows were caught and ringed at a roost in hawthorns at Knaresborough Ringing Station and 6,586 were caught at the Station between 1965 and 1969. Also very common at this time were Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Goldfinches and Linnets which frequented the stubbles and also gravel pits, where they fed on thistles and weed seeds, particularly *Polygonum* and *Chenopodium*, in the then 'not so tidy' and sanitised countryside. Flocks of these four species regularly numbered 200 to 500, and sometimes more, the largest being 1,000 Chaffinches near Masham in 1995, 1,000 Linnets at Hay-a-Park Gravel Pit in August 1976 and 700 at Nosterfield Gravel Pit in October 1977. A striking example was during the first

two weeks of January 1967, when a waterlogged, uncut field of barley at Farnham Gravel Pits, attracted very many birds, maxima being 4,000 Starlings, 300 Sky Larks, 2,000 mixed House and Tree Sparrows, 1,000 Greenfinches, 200 Yellowhammers, 50 Reed Buntings and 60 Corn Buntings, an event which would be impossible to experience today. Regrettably, autumn stubble fields are no longer available, the grain being harvested and taken to store in one operation and the fields promptly ploughed and re-sown. The only birds seen on the moors were 12 Meadow Pipits gathered together preparatory to migration.

These are just a few examples of formerly very common farmland birds, many other species, including songbirds having also suffered serious national declines. I fear that never again will we or our descendants witness the multitude of small birds which were once a feature of our farmland. It is a sobering thought to realise that the only places where one can now guarantee to see finches and buntings, albeit in small numbers, are at feeding stations in gardens and at reserves.

The recent natural north-western spread into Britain of exotic herons, the obsession to create and manage suitable habitat for their breeding and the successful introduction of Red Kites may be exciting for many, but little compensation for the loss of millions of small passerines. In conclusion, during our five-hour drive at a steady pace, much to the frustration of impatient road users, we saw from the moving car only 57 individual birds of ten species as follows, not in order of appearance:

Mandarin Duck	a drake at Hartwith Mill Dam.
Red Kite	one near Darley.
Wood Pigeon	ten scattered throughout.
Kestrel	one near Fellbeck.
Carrion Crow	six individuals in sheep pasture.
Rook	two small flocks, one of eight and one of six.
Jackdaw	four only.
Pied Wagtail	one in Pateley Bridge.
Meadow Pipit	a flock of 12 on the moors and six near Darley.
House Sparrow	one at Ripley.

A similarly driven transect on another day in the same area, or any other local journey particularly in the more arable southern part of our district, would inevitably produce a different result but, I'm afraid, not significantly more encouraging. Ironically, in addition, when nearing home in Aspin Lane with just 200 yards to go, the short turf of King James's School sports field had

attracted 50 Black-headed Gulls, 30 Rooks and 40 Jackdaws, more than twice the number of birds we had seen all day!

References: Mather J.R. 2001 *Birds of the Harrogate District*.

**Dr. John R. Mather BEM and Ann Mettam.**

## FARNHAM NEWS

A Whooper Swan was seen on 5<sup>th</sup> **March** and a drake Mandarin Duck was also present. Two days later, 35 Whooper Swans flew over west. Nineteen Whooper Swans flew west and 200 Pink-footed Geese flew north-west on 14<sup>th</sup>, on which day the first Chiffchaff was seen and, by the end of the month, 16 were recorded. Redwings and Fieldfares were present in small numbers until 21<sup>st</sup>. Oystercatchers were returning with a maximum of nine seen during the month. Maximum wildfowl counts were: Canada Goose – 44, Greylag Goose – 23, Mute Swan – 4, Shoveler – 2, Gadwall – 6, Wigeon – 2, Mallard – 16, Teal – 2, Pochard – 2, Tufted Duck – 38, Goldeneye – 41, Little Grebe – 2, Great Crested Grebe – 8, Coot – 74.

Bird recording took place on only three days in **April** before the site was closed on 8<sup>th</sup> in line with Covid-19 restrictions. Twenty Chiffchaffs were noted on 3<sup>rd</sup>, also Willow Warbler and Blackcap. Sand Martin numbers increased to 30. A pair of Great Crested Grebes had a nest on the North Lake and a Nuthatch was seen at a nest hole in the area. Maximum wildfowl counts were: Mute Swan – 8, Shoveler – 1, Gadwall – 4, Mallard – 13, Tufted Duck – 42, Great Crested Grebe – 10, Moorhen – 10, Coot – 19.

The site re-opened on 15<sup>th</sup> **May** – one can only imagine what records had been missed. Geese had bred and present were 48 adult Canada Geese with 18 goslings and 73 adult Greylags with 42 goslings. A pair of Mute Swans was breeding and, on the North Lake, a pair of Great Crested Grebes had six young. A pair of Egyptian Geese was present for ten days.

On 1<sup>st</sup> **June**, a Shelduck appeared on the North Lake with six ducklings, this being the first evidence of its presence. A Common Tern was trying, against all odds, to find a nesting space on the platform amongst all the dominating Black-headed Gulls. A family party of Lesser Whitethroats was seen on 5<sup>th</sup> and a pair of Reed Warblers was in the reed bed. A female Egyptian Goose was seen with four young goslings, obviously having bred close by in the area.

A long-dead Cormorant was found wearing a Darvic ring 2PG. It was ringed as a nestling on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019 on Puffin Island, off Anglesey. Maximum wildfowl counts were: Canada Goose – 101, Greylag Goose – 282, Egyptian Goose – 5, Mute Swan – 4, Shelduck – 7, Gadwall – 9, Mallard – 32, Tufted Duck – 10, Little Grebe – 2, Great Crested Grebe – 8, Moorhen – 6, Coot – 59.

A Little Egret was present on 1<sup>st</sup> **July** and a female Gadwall with eight young was seen on 4<sup>th</sup>, when two Common Tern chicks were located on the island below the tern platform, which they must have vacated in a hurry! Oystercatchers were on the move with 19 counted on 4<sup>th</sup> and a Hobby was seen the next day. The alarm calls of the pair of Common Terns, drew my attention to an Osprey which was flying over on 12<sup>th</sup>. A Little Egret with colour rings which was present, had been seen on the site last summer. One hundred Sand Martins were counted and an estimated 35+ pairs were breeding in the wall. A pair of Reed Warblers was seen in the *Phragmites* which the anglers had planted around the edges of the North Lake. Although the sound of Little Grebes trilling confirms their presence, they are very elusive when breeding but eventually, two pairs were seen with young. For some reason, the two pairs of Great Crested Grebes attempting to breed on the South Lake both failed after two attempts, unlike those on the North Lake which were most successful. Similarly, in early June, the Mute Swans had five cygnets but by 27<sup>th</sup> only two were left and for no apparent reason as they all appeared to be healthy. Maximum wildfowl counts were: Canada Goose – 135, Greylag Goose – 151, Mute Swan – 4, Gadwall – 8, Mallard – 42, Tufted Duck – 32, Little Grebe – 6, Great Crested Grebe – 12, Moorhen – 12, Coot – 56.

During the first week of **August**, seven Spotted Flycatchers were seen and a late brood of young fledged Reed Warblers was in the reed bed. A Green Sandpiper and a juvenile Mandarin Duck were present on 14<sup>th</sup> and, on the North Lake, a pair of Great Crested Grebes was seen with three chicks from a second brood. A Hobby was present next day and also a male Pied Flycatcher, a very scarce passage migrant. Common Sandpipers were recorded on fifteen days in the month, six Ruff were present on 18<sup>th</sup> with one on 21<sup>st</sup>. The next day, two young Hobbys flew in and, as it began to rain, they perched in a tree where they were watched for fifteen minutes until the rain eased; there were six sightings of Hobby from mid-month onwards. A Green Sandpiper was present and a juvenile Common Redstart was feeding from a stick pile on 22<sup>nd</sup> while, on the same day, three Ruff and three Common Redshanks were found amongst 110 Lapwings. The maximum count of Lapwings in August was 400 on 4<sup>th</sup>. Warblers continued to be seen with 18 Chiffchaffs on 31<sup>st</sup> and Lesser Whitethroat, Reed Warbler and Willow Warbler also seen at the end of the month. Over 100 Goldfinches were found feeding



on Knapweed, Thistles, Ragwort and, latterly, Rosebay Willowherb seeds. Maximum wildfowl counts were: Canada Goose – 41, Greylag Goose – 105, Mute Swan – 6, Gadwall – 10, Mallard – 28, Teal – 2, Tufted Duck – 31, Little Grebe – 7, Great Crested Grebe – 15, Cormorant – 3, Moorhen – 20, Coot – 105.

Our Recorder, Mike Barnham, visited Farnham on 2<sup>nd</sup> August and recorded 14 species of butterfly, the most interesting being 183 Meadow Browns, 148 Gatekeepers, 11 Small Skippers, 10 Common Blues, 14 Brown Argus, 10 Green-veined Whites, 3 Purple Hairstreaks and 51 Peacocks.

On 5<sup>th</sup> **September** Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Wall butterflies were recorded, making a total of 21 species during 2020, while 14 species of dragonfly were on site. A Red Underwing moth was present on 16<sup>th</sup> August. Mammals recorded during the year were Fox, Stoat and Roe Deer.

I would like to thank Ian Walker, who was the only contributor to the bird log during my absence from April to July.

**June E. Atkinson** Chair, Management Committee and Honorary Warden.

## **FARNHAM MANAGEMENT DAYS      2020 – 2021**

Safe working distances to be observed. Please take hand sanitisers and gloves. If any member does not wish to take part, please let me know.

2020

SEPTEMBER 27<sup>th</sup>

OCTOBER 25<sup>th</sup>

NOVEMBER 29<sup>th</sup>

DECEMBER 13<sup>th</sup>

2021

JANUARY 17<sup>th</sup>

FEBRUARY 21<sup>st</sup>

MARCH 21<sup>st</sup>

All are on SUNDAYS

Please meet at the hide at 10 a.m.

Further details from June on 01423 885612.

## HARROGATE NATURALISTS' FORUM

### Harrogate Naturalists' Forum on Facebook!

Our **private Facebook Forum** continues to be very active in covering most corners of natural history with some great photos and wide-ranging discussions. Currently the Forum has 28 members but we would like to see as many more HDNS members as possible supporting and taking advantage of this facility. The discussions can be light-hearted or more serious but are not accessible to the general public. The photos don't have to be exhibition quality, just share what you have seen. You don't have to be an expert, asking questions is encouraged. We are happy for you to join and just silently follow the friendly exchanges but of course we hope that at some stage you will feel able to add your own two penn'orth to the proceedings! This is a great way to keep in touch with other Society members and enjoy your natural history, without restricting numbers, wearing a mask or social distancing!

If you wish **to join**, or have any queries, then please **email Group Admin**, Robert Marshall, at **hdns.wildwatch@btinternet.com** - please also include the **email address** you intend to use for the Forum and your **full name**, if this isn't obvious from your email address. This will help speed approval. You will then be sent a **link** to join our Facebook Forum. (You will need to set up a **free Facebook account** if you don't already have one) Please do it today, before you forget! We hope to see many more of you on the Forum soon!

**Robert Marshall**

### Lockdown Botany

My lockdown walk is a half-mile circuit round West End Avenue and Park Avenue: in fact, I've been doing it for fifty-five years. The pavement is fringed with neat strips of grass, mown by the Council until the lockdown economies left the grass to grow unchecked for weeks. A wild-flower display developed, of remarkable variety. Dandelions, buttercups, daisies and docks to start with; then lush grass and ox-eye daisies in a few south-facing plots in Park Avenue. In Park Avenue South, where the ground is drier, clover, bird's foot trefoil, pineapple mayweed. Where did the seeds come from? It is nearly a hundred years since this was open fields. Eventually I made the effort and took a notebook and Fitter with me – at which point the Council cut the grass, and all I found were wilting piles of cuttings.

And the moral of this story is, keep records from day one.

**Val Smith**

## DISCOUNTS

**Cotswold & Leeds North Face Store** 15% discount (excluding sale goods, gift vouchers, carriage) in store, online or mail order. Quote the affiliation/promotional code AF-HDNS-W3.

**Bass & Bligh** Flexible discount, including photo printing and services.

**Blacks** of Harrogate: 10% discount: present HDNS, RSPB or NT card.

**Lynne Gilland, Hon. Treasurer**

## CALL FOR RECORDS

All members – please send your observations and records for 2020 to the appropriate Recorder (see membership card for details). Unusual sightings, unusual habitats, early or late sightings, interesting observations – include time and place, and make sure that what you see becomes part of our cumulative records of the local wildlife.

## NEWSLETTER: HELP REQUIRED

Val Smith and Valerie Holmes would like to hand over the production of the twice-yearly Newsletter. This involves collating the articles sent in by Members, sending the text of the Newsletter to Enid Taylor's, posting to Members and arranging for the Newsletter to be posted on the Website. It would be helpful if Members with access to Computers could read the Newsletter online. This would keep costs down and reduce the administration.

## CONTACT DETAILS

### **General Secretary: Mrs Sue Coldwell**

4 Abbots Way, Knaresborough, HG5 8EU

tel: 868043

email: gen.sechdns@yahoo.co.uk

### **Membership Secretary: Ms Val Smith**

97 West End Avenue, Harrogate, HG2 9BU

tel: 503932

email: memsec.hdns1@talktalk.net

**Website:** [www.hdns.org.uk](http://www.hdns.org.uk)



Material for the **Spring newsletter** should be sent  
to Valerie Holmes by **14 March 2021**

Post: 63, Jesmond Road Harrogate HG1 4SA  
tel: 888997  
email: valerieholmes@hotmail.co.uk

-----  
*Thank you for your support in these difficult times*

**SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL**      Year beginning **1 April 2020**

**Note:** if you pay your subscription by standing order, you will see an asterisk next to your name on the address label of this newsletter.

NAME.....

POSTCODE.....

*Would you like to have your email address included in a list for new events, etc? (No need to fill this in if you are already on the list)*

EMAIL.....

Individual £20      ☐      Joint/Family £30      ☐

**BIRD REPORT 2020**    Collected £5      ☐      Posted £6.50      ☐

Cheques payable to Harrogate & District Naturalists' Society  
Send to Ms Val Smith 97 West End Avenue Harrogate HG2 9BU