

Sandnats



GRASS SNAKE

© ANDY PURCELL

ANNUAL REPORT

THE BULLETIN OF THE SANDWELL VALLEY NATURALISTS' CLUB

VOL. 27 NO.3 MARCH 2005



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Sandwell Valley Naturalists' Club (SANDNATS) was formed in 1975. Its members work to conserve the Valley's wildlife, help others to enjoy it, and liaise with Sandwell Council about the management of the Valley.

OFFICERS

- **PRESIDENT - John Shrimpton**
- **VICE-PRESIDENTS - Freda Briden, Peter Shirley**
- **CHAIR - Tony Wood**
- **TREASURER - Frances Hudson**
- **SECRETARY Margaret Shuker (0121 357 1067)**
- **MEMBERSHIP - Marian Brevitt
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- **BULLETIN EDITOR -Mike
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- **PRESS OFFICER - Tony Wood**
- **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**
- **Sheila Hadley, Arthur Stevenson
and Bill Moodie.**
- **HON AUDITORS**
- **Peter Shirley & Arthur Stevenson**

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EDITORIAL

The passage of another year has seen continuity with regard to the Club's involvement in the nature conservation of the Sandwell Valley. It has fostered its existing relationships with kindred bodies and has contributed where it can to both practical management activities and also promotion of wildlife to the public as explained in these pages. The activities of the harvest mouse monitoring group with its associated breeding and release programme have achieved much here. A number of major developments on the RSPB reserve were key features during 2004 but other matters such as the Council's review of its provision for open space across Sandwell Borough are likely to demand our attention during 2005. There is potential for much to happen here and if we wish it to be in accordance with good wildlife conservation practice, vigilance and active representation are likely to be crucial.

As usual I have to thank a number of people for support in production of the bulletin during the year. Margaret Shuker has been a tower of strength to the club, not only in her role as secretary, but also as a commentator on club events. Her excellent accounts of club meetings do not need repetition in this bulletin and I have therefore limited the report section somewhat. Andy Purcell has continued to give us cover photographs, the one here having particular relevance especially in the context of the appearance of the otter in 2004, in reminding us that key faunal elements can return if suitable habitat and conditions are available.

2004 was a sobering year in several respects. In a wider context we note the death of Leslie Pinkess. For many years a stalwart of Birmingham Natural History Society, he was also a leading light during the formative years of the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham & the Black Country. He also admired the work of Sandnats and encouraged me in pursuit of our task in the Valley on a number of occasions. Closer to home, we send our best wishes to Cath and Bob Mansell. Bob is currently recovering from a serious illness. In spite of that he has still contrived to assemble his usual weather report. Our good wishes go also to Tom Parker who has, of necessity, become more confined to his home of late. We hope he may manage to come to some of this year's events.

Finally, it is with regret that we have to say farewell to Colin Horne who will be leaving us shortly for another job connected with the RSPB. He has done much excellent work for the reserve during his tenure and has encouraged the Club at all times. It has always been a pleasure to work with him and we wish him every success in his future job.

CHAIRMANS' REPORT

Unfortunately I was not able to attend many meetings due to working shifts plus coincidence with my holiday arrangements and sickness, but I believe Andy's talk on 'British Wildlife' (I was in Jamaica at the time) was well attended and almost with standing room only. Members who attended the annual dinner also had an enjoyable evening. Marian's Garden Party in July was a big success, raising a considerable amount of money for club funds. I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for inviting members and friends into her garden.

The Red Bull 24hr race was not staged in the Valley last year as the organisers felt it was time for a change and an alternative venue was found; the Red Bull organisers usually use a location only once.

The fence has finally been replaced in Sot's Hole and it is hoped that the long awaited improvements to the path around the golf course tee and the re-siting of the steps will be done during the coming year. Work for the improvements to the pathways in Park Farm Wood and Priory Wood has not materialised.

We have had some new members join our ranks last year, which is very encouraging, but we still need more members- any ideas?

The harvest mice project is still ongoing and the club made a donation of £100 to Paul Essex to purchase some traps, £90 of this being raised at the Sandwell Show by Heather Poulton and her friend Michelle Jeavons. (well done). Paul is hoping to do some trapping events in the Valley in the coming year that will hopefully lead to success and also supply us with other small mammal records.

The Sandwell Valley Naturalists' Club
Statement of Income and expenditure for the Year to 31 December 2004

Income	2004	2003
Membership	386.00	249
Visitors	2.00	--
Donations	5.80	31
Garden Party	203.20	151
Sundry Receipts	--	
Refreshments	19.81	24
Raffles	28.00	-
Sale of nuts, seeds etc	6.00	10
Sale of Flora	67.00	10
Sale of Wildlife of S.V.	<u>9.00</u>	<u>9</u>
	129.81	53
Annual Dinner	186.40	210
Severn Trent Water – net dividend	32
Bank Interest – net	3.07	11
Sale of Birds of the Sandwell Valley	55.60	135
Sundry Sales at Sandwell Show	<u>90.00</u>	<u>69</u>
	1061.88	941
Expenditure		
Room Rental	150.00	150
Printing, Stationery & Postage (including Flora Bulletins)	463.61	191
BTCV Membership	25.00	25
Insurance	<u>168.75</u>	<u>166</u>
	193.75	191
Wildlife Trust Fee	28.00	28
Annual Dinner	197.00	213
Donations to –		
Paul Essex (Harvest Mice traps)	100.00	
Lecturer's Expenses	25
Upton Warren Bird Reserve	<u>.....</u>	<u>40</u>
	100.00	65
Website Domain Registration (2 years)	<u>16.45</u>	<u>-</u>
	1148.81	838
Excess of expenditure over Income for the year to 31 December 2004	<u>(£86.93)</u>	<u>£103</u>

We have prepared this Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2004 from books and records maintained, information supplied and explanations given, and certify that it is in accordance therewith.

Mr. Peter Shirley, Mr. Arthur Stevenson,

Joint Auditors 13 January 2005.

The Sandwell Valley Naturalists' Club

Cash Account

Balances at 31 December 2003	£	
Yorkshire Bank Current Account		2773.84
Add : Cash unrepresented 31 December 2003		<u>16.00</u>
		2789.84
Less : Unrepresented cheques and reserve not required at 31 December 2003		<u>280.89</u>
		2508.95
Yorkshire Bank Monthly Premium Account		<u>3008.61</u>
		5517.56
Less : Excess of Expenditure over Income for the year		<u>86.93</u>
		<u>5430.63</u>

Represented by

Yorkshire Bank Current Account		1019.98
Add : Reserves and Payments in advance		
October 2003 dividend	16	
Room Rental	<u>175</u>	<u>191.00</u>
		1210.98
Less : Membership in advance	72	
Room Rental – 2002 reserve not required	105	
Printing of Nov. 2004 Bulletin	<u>113.16</u>	<u>290.16</u>
		920.82
Yorkshire Bank Monthly Premium Account		<u>4509.81</u>
		<u>5430.63</u>

- Notes** 1. Book account as at 31 December 2004
‘Birds of Sandwell Valley

Cost of 1000 copies		3250.00
Complimentary, display and damaged copies –	58 at cost	188.50
Sales	365	2231.35
Stock in hand	<u>577</u> at cost	1875.25
	<u>1000</u>	
Profit on sales to date		<u>1045.10</u>
		<u>4295.10</u>

2. The Club held 95 Severn Trent Ordinary shares at 31 December 2004
Market value at 13 January 2005 being £899.17 (£685.90)

Meeting Reports

Thanks are due to Margaret Shuker for covering these in the newsletters. There now follow a selection of others. Lynn Poulton felt compelled to write her own Warrens Hall report for personal reasons. I have written an account of the Hartlebury Common meeting. Paul Essex joins us as a writer and his report on the Sandwell Show is most welcome. His other contributions in publicising the harvest mouse project are also summarised in two additional reports. Having been part of a winning team in the Christmas quiz for the first time ever, I also wished to write my own short report for it!

Bumble Hole and Warrens Hall Nature Reserves: Wednesday 2nd June 2004

This meeting was of particular interest to me because I was brought up in the area and went to nearby schools. We were greeted at the Visitor Centre by Sue and Dave Goodyear of the Bumble Hole Conservation Group, who had kindly agreed to accompany us and share their specialist knowledge with us.

It is hard to believe this was once a major coal mining area, with blast furnaces, factories, timber yards, saw mills, boat yards, brick kilns and iron works. Substantial landscape improvements have transformed it into an attractive green area now used for walking, cycling, fishing and horse-riding.

The Reserves fall within the boundaries of both Dudley and Sandwell Councils. The Conservation Group is a registered charity with local people volunteering their time to run educational visits for schools, undertake conservation work and raise funds to keep the centre open to receive around 22,000 visitors throughout the year. Bumble Hole features in the children's television series "Rosie and Jim" which is about two charming puppet characters who spend most of their time on a canal boat.

We were led along the canal which was built in 1793-1798, passing the canal basin where a hundred boats a day would travel to and from the collieries and factories between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, with a toll system operating from the end of the 19th century. Stone fittings remain from the "gauging point" where the keeper would determine the toll from the weight and type of cargo carried by the boats.

We found biting stonecrop *Sedum acre* growing all over the Toll Island.

Cobb's Engine House is a Scheduled Ancient Monument now owned by National Heritage and built in 1831, which housed a Boulton and Watt steam engine to pump away water from the coal mines. We walked beyond this and climbed to the top of Warrens Hall Colliery Spoil Heap where we enjoyed spectacular views of Rowley Hills, Clent and Walton Hills, Frankley Beeches and Malvern Hills.

Dave told us that the anchors and chains for the Titanic were made at Noah Hingley's Iron Works that used to stand on the Bumble Hole site.

On our walk we encountered ploughman's spikenard *Inula conyzae*, a lime-loving plant growing from the brickwork of Windmill End Bridge. We were told the bridge is due for overhaul in the next five years, which means that this plant may well be lost to the site. We came across fairy rings and one patch of common restharrow *Ononis repens* which was not in flower, having been recently mowed. This was on the site of the brickworks that produced the bricks for the Netherton Tunnel, and where Heather had been racing horses on a recent hack.

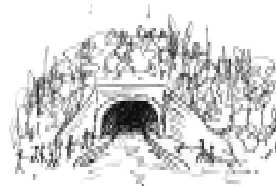
Among the many birds encountered were song thrush, long-tailed tits and swallows, and we were told there was a pair of herons nesting. Visiting birds also include kestrels, sparrowhawks, coots, moorhen, dabchicks and Canada geese.

We walked to the Netherton Tunnel which was commissioned by the Earl of Dudley and was the last tunnel to be constructed in the UK in the middle of the 19th century. Nine men were killed and eighteen seriously injured during the construction of it, with over twenty six million bricks from seven brickyards being used in the process, involving 50,000 bricks being shipped along the canal every day. We proceeded a short way into the tunnel to see the three cracks which were discovered when it was inspected on the day following the recent earthquake.

Apart from the many interesting species we came across during the evening, the meeting was very informative and gave us an appreciation of the local area. There was something of interest for all our members with a diversity of botanical species, birds, butterflies and wildlife,

beautiful views over surrounding areas, and the added bonus of historical remains preserved to confirm its past. Returning to the Visitor Centre, we were able to discuss the evening and examine the many displays on show in the centre, and refreshments were available. The evening had been extremely pleasant and educational with plenty of sunshine and birdsong. We expressed our gratitude to the leaders Sue and Dave Goodyear, and thanked Mike Poulton for inviting them to join us.

Lynn Poulton



Hartlebury Common :14th August 2004

This was an important joint event with representatives of the British Plant Gall Society and the Wyre Forest Study Group Present. The weather also smiled on the twenty naturalists who joined the expedition. They included Worcestershire flora, bryophyte and moth recorders, so a great day was in prospect. We met at Wilden Top car park to explore the Common, which is remarkable both for its invertebrates and its flora – with several hundred plant species on record. Habitats included ancient woodland and oak scrub, a large and varied ericaceous component in extensive sandy areas (where a remarkable aculeate fauna is located) and a boggy area with a very local set of plants (including bogbean & marsh cinquefoil). Our leader for the day was David Scott, for many years the ranger responsible for the site.

The expedition got off to an excellent start with Tony Simpson (moths) immediately finding an impressive emperor moth caterpillar on heather. Before long the party had spread far & wide in search of specific treasures. Gall find of the day was *Taphrina caerulescens*, a fungus causing large blisters on red oak leaves. It was remarkable to discover this most uncommon gall on a red oak variety in this place, but there is a small plantation with introductions at the top of the main escarpment.

The crowning botanical sighting was of the Hartlebury speciality sand catchfly (*Silene conica*) near the garden centre, John Day (botanical recorder) telling Mike Poulton that it had been in the same spot for years & was found nowhere else in Worcestershire. Other nice heathland plants included cross-leaved heath, sand spurrey and heath groundsel. Damper areas provided some marsh cinquefoil and a kingfisher, which

joined linnet and swallow as other bird species recorded for the excursion. Some of the best finds of the day were entomological, David Scott leading us to some excellent locations. Dragonflies recorded included common , brown and migrant hawkers and the butterflies, small copper, common blue, large white, meadow brown , speckled wood and gatekeeper were also frequently seen. Malcolm Smart made a number of captures, including the local solitary bee *Lasioglossum lativentre*, and then, together with Robert Black, we were able to find a good number of the specialised insects on this famous site. These included the very large solitary wasp *Podalonia affinis*- a considerable rarity. On this day it scuttled across sand and light vegetation in search of large caterpillars, entirely unconcerned by the attendant photographer (Kevin McGhee) crawling after it! Kevin also had the honour of adding the spider- hunting wasp *Evagetes dubius* to the aculeate list for the common. John Meiklejohn was delighted to find the tiny ant *Lasius alienus* on a sandy exposure towards the main road. The expedition concluding, we went into the dense deciduous wood near Wilden to see an active hornet's nest. A great end to a great day.

The list following gives some idea of the habitat preferences of some insects recorded. G is grassland. H is a heathland specialist. L not confined to heaths. R is a regionally Rare species. SH a semi –heathland insect. U is universal. W is normally woodland. Bold lettering indicates a very scarce insect. * indicates taken from Dr A.N.B.Simpson's list.

<u>Family</u>	<u>Species & Status</u>		
MOTHS			
Oecophoridae	* <i>Carcina quercana</i>	W	
Gelechiidae	* <i>Aristotelia ericinella</i>	H	
	* <i>Aroga velocella</i>	L	
Tortricidae	* <i>Pandemis corylana</i>	CW	
Pyralidae	* <i>Crambus hamella</i>	GSH	
	* <i>Agriphila geniculea</i>	G	
	* <i>Agriphila tristella</i>	G	
	* <i>Saturnia pavonia</i>	SH	EMPEROR MOTH
Saturniidae	* <i>Anarta Myrtila</i>	H	
Noctuidae	<i>Autographa gamma</i>	U	SILVER Y
TRUE BUGS			
Alydidae	<i>Alydus calcaratus</i>	R H	
Rhopalidae	<i>Chorosoma schillingi</i>	GSH	
ANTS			
Formicidae	<i>Lasius alienus</i>	SH	

SPIDER HUNTING WASPS

Pompilidae	<i>Agenioideus cinctellus</i>	L	
	<i>Evagetes crassicornis</i>	SH	
	<i>Evagetes dubius</i>	SH	
	<i>Episyron rufipes</i>	SH	

SOCIAL WASPS

Vespidae	<i>Vespa crabro</i>	W	HORNET
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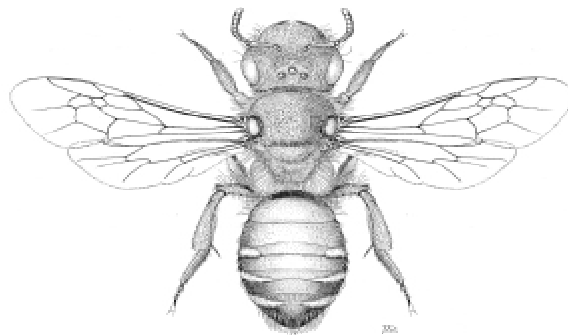
SOLITARY WASPS

Sphecidae	<i>Crossocerus 4-maculatus</i>	L	
	<i>Ammophila sabulosa</i>	SH	
	<i>Podalonia affinis</i>	SH	
	<i>Mellinus arvensis</i>	SH	
	<i>Cerceris rybyensis</i>	SH	
	<i>Philanthus triangulum</i>	SH	BEE WOLF

BEEES

Colletidae	<i>Colletes succinctus</i>	H	
Andrenidae	<i>Andrena fuscipes</i>	H	
	<i>Andrena bimaculata</i>	L	
Halictidae	<i>Lasioglossum lativentre</i>	SH	
	<i>Lasioglossum punctatissimum</i>	L	
	<i>Sphecodes pellucidus</i>	SH	
Melittidae	<i>Dasypoda altercator</i>	L	
Anthophoridae	<i>Nomada rufipes</i>	H	
	<i>Nomada flavoguttata</i>	SH	
	<i>Epeolus cruciger</i>	H	
Apidae	<i>Apis mellifera</i>	U	HONEY BEE

Editor.



AN ANDRENA SPECIES (SOLITARY BEE)

The Sandwell Show: Sunday 29th & Monday 30th of August

The 2004 event was the usual busy event. My main misgiving was that the many conservation bodies represented each year could be located a little closer together because they complement each other in many ways. At the SANDNATS stand on Sunday we had Mike Bloxham with literature and photographs. Together with this was an assortment of water creatures in containers that greatly interested the visiting public, especially the young lads, who were keen to find out all the ones that would bite! One of them inadvertently said 'does it bite?' when offered the reward biscuit tin!

On view we also had some of our harvest mice brought along by Janet Granger. We were very lucky to have Sheila Hadley to help out and we took it in turns to talk about them to the stream of people who visited our table.

Bank Holiday Monday turned out to be another busy and eventful day. Marian Brevitt arrived to help and we were joined by Mike, Heather and Lynn Poulton, together with Michelle Jeavons. They had prepared a special show for the day as they have in earlier years. They worked very hard all day entertaining the crowd and although the rabbit masks were still not a hit, everything else was. Thanks to the efforts of Heather and Michelle, SANDNATS raised over £90 on the day and the girls asked if the money could be put towards live traps to aid the harvest mouse monitoring programme. Shortly after the Sandwell Show I was asked to attend a SANDNATS committee meeting where I was presented with a cheque for £100 to purchase traps.

I think I can speak for all when I say that the two day event was busy, full of interest and well worth the effort put in by everyone concerned. I, for one, look forward to doing it again in 2005.

Paul Essex

Other SANDNATS events with the Harvest Mice.

The Sandwell Show was not the only event attended by Paul and the mice. The summer saw the Club represented at Forge Mill Farm open day by Pete Shirley and Paul Essex. The mice were a feature and later they were joined by the editor, with his display of the most unpleasant and vicious cattle flies so the public could see what the farm animals had to put up with.

The team was again in action at the Eastwood Road site later in the year when the adjoining Primary school again hosted Joe Miskin's Open Day. A series of walks and events made this a useful day for all comers and members who have not seen the site recently will be interested to see the outcome of recent conservation work. A look round the site will require less than an hour on a spare afternoon.

Mike Bloxham

The Christmas Quiz: December 11th 2004

The evening saw a smaller than usual gathering but a spirit of competition was very much in the air following the success of the 2003 event . This year we were joined by a formidable team of Countryside Rangers, who were determined to show us what they could do! Equipment was handed out and the various sections of the quiz unfolded. Between rounds scores were totalled and the relative success of the component teams began to emerge. The slide section was again a bad one for the Editor who let his team down by misidentifying a tree. Luckily his colleagues could identify a picture of the old Environmental Centre (currently the changing rooms and miniature golf office). Chris & Brenda have a genius for taking photographs of familiar Valley places in such a way that only the very observant have a chance of recognising what they are. Dwarfs came on the scene this year (Christmas reindeers in 2003), the music section with some Vivaldi gave our team a clean sweep for the first time and all concluded with much merriment. A feature of the event was the care with which gifts and cards were prepared by Chris & Brenda. We were indebted to them for a great evening.

Editor

Weather and Travel Notes for 2004 by Bob and Cath Mansell

Weather facts and figures recorded in the garden (Holly Lane ,Smethwick) and elsewhere. Temperatures recorded in Fahrenheit.

January

The first of January is always the day I start my cycling fitness programme for the year, but this year it rained for most of the day- pretty heavily at times- maximum temperature of 41degrees F. I did not go out!

January 3rd

snow showers.

January 6th

We woke up to blue skies, 48°F and a chance to cycle on the canal towpaths of the Galton Valley. Had a good sighting of a green woodpecker drinking on the towpath.

January 8th

Half an inch of rain fell between 4 a.m. & 4 p.m. easing Severn-Trent's water problems!

January 27th

Lovely blue skies, but 36°F would give snow by late evening.

January 28th

A lot of drivers caught out by a lot of snow late in the afternoon. Folk who were walking had no problem. The night temperature dropped to 27°F.



February



February 1st

A blue sky with temperature of 56°F after rain all the previous day.

February 3rd

Temperature up to 56°F. Cath spotted coltsfoot in flower on the canal towpath at Kings Norton junction.

February 13th

A mild day- hardly any wind- good enough for a 25 mile cycle ride. Cath and I saw our first skylark of the year along with 11 buzzards near Boscobel House.

Most of the month had temperatures in the low 40's with sunny spells & showers. On the 27th we woke to half an inch of snow.

March

March 1st

Blue sky with very few clouds and temperature 41° F max.

March 2nd

Weather similar. We decided to use our OAP travel passes and caught the train to Dorridge for a cycle ride in the Warwickshire lanes. In all the 35 mile round trip to Hampton Lacey was worthwhile both physically and to see wildlife; included being two buzzards, two little owls, wood spurge & common field speedwell.

March 12th

Waking up to more snow.

March 16th

A complete contrast with temperature up to 62°F, blue skies and a day out on man's most wonderful invention!

March 19th

All change again with an inch of rain and 40mph winds.

March 20th – 23rd

Days made up of rain, hail, sleet and snow.

March 26th.

A bright day with hardly any wind, so OAP travel passes and bicycles to Wolverhampton- quickly onto the cycle path outside the station and onto the canal towpath to Pendeford Road and the Canes. Past Chillington Hall to the Spider's Web café to look after the 'inner man'. This was also a good day for flora & fauna. Three greylag geese and two kingfishers were seen on the canal. Red legged partridge and buzzard were noted as well as lungwort, primrose and scurvy grass.

The last day of March saw blue skies, a temperature of 64°F and a downpour from nowhere in the early evening. The earlier 35 mile cycle ride from Penkrige station to the Canes of the Staffordshire 'milk' belt gave us brimstone, peacock, small tortoiseshell and cabbage white butterflies together with a bit of useful exercise for adventures to come later in the year.

April

April 1st

Typical, with temperatures of 55°F plus showers.

April 14th

More cycling weather (temperature 60°F) . Again to Penkrige and a cross- country ride, this time to Wellington via lovely Canes and Hink's Plantation with enormous areas of wood anemone and very good patches of yellow archangel.

The hottest April day was the 25th, with a day temperature of 70° and night falling to 54°F. The following night saw one inch of rainfall.

May

May 1st

55°F and a canal towpath ride round the Heartlands Coop. Cath spotted 44 different species of wild flowers out, including corn salad. The

highlight for us was a young cormorant on the canal beneath Spaghetti Junction. The next day the temperature shot up to 66°F.

May 6th

Cath and I started a week's walking expedition on the Greek Island of Samos with temperatures up to 86°F. We were lucky to see flamingo, glossy ibis, Egyptian goose, red-rumped swallow and common sandpiper. There was, of course, an abundance of wild flowers including gladioli, tasselled hyacinth and a number of orchids. There were a number of species Cath could not identify although we had the handbook 'Wild Flower of the Mediterranean' with us. Back home to temperatures in the mid. 60s.

May 17th

Woke up to sunshine & very few clouds, so we put our bicycles on the train to Telford and using the town's excellent cycle path system reached the disused railway route to Bridgenorth, seeing many wild flowers and cycling along banks of ramsons which seemed to go on for miles. Cath, the botanist, had never seen so many. Maximum temperature for the day 72°F.

June

June 1st

Rain- overcast all day – 58°F. Next day back up to 67°F.

June 8th

Hottest day of the month with 81°F recorded.

June 12th

Cath and I arrived at the town of Passau on the German - Austrian border for two weeks and 400 miles of cycling adventure along the Danube valley to Vienna and back.

On reaching the town of Persenburg we sheltered under a linden tree 300 years old with its accompanying tribute to the composer Schubert. The cycle way (totally motor-free) was a mass of flowers. Sometimes long stretches of purple mullein- sometimes yards of scabious: verges with meadow clary, meadow rue and groups of lesser butterfly orchids: shaded hedgerows with various bellflower species- cornflower and larkspur- all adorned our route. Eventually we reached Vienna itself where we danced in the squares (although not very well!) to the waltzes of Strauss- but what a wonderful way to get there! While we were in the city, a widespread heavy storm broke out and our journey back was rather shorter on flowers because of the bashing they had received. The 'top spot' for me was seeing golden orioles. Our weather had been

mostly sunny with Showers and Sandwell's had been much the same.

July

July 1st

Sunshine and showers. The month continued with roughly the same theme- maximum temperature being 74°F on July 29th. Nights were generally mild with a coldest temperature of 50°F.

August

August 1st

78°F with sunshine and clouds. This was the first in a sequence of six warm days (78°, 76°, 74°, 78°, 78° & 79°F). The pattern did not continue and the month saw a good deal of rainfall.

Beyond this point regular weather recording was, unfortunately, not possible.

December 31st saw the year end with a rainy morning followed by broken cloud with showers and the odd sunny spell, bringing to the end an average English year weather-wise!

Bob & Cath Mansell

Mammal Report

MAMMALIA (Mammals)

ORDER: INSECTIVORA (Insectivores)

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Type of Record</u>
<i>Talpa europaea</i>	Mole.	MH
<i>Sorex araneus</i>	Common Shrew.	VS

ORDER: CHIROPTERA (Bats)

<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>	Noctule.	VS
<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	Pipistrelle.	VS

ORDER: LAGOMORPHA

(Hares & rabbits)

<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Rabbit.	VS
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ORDER: RODENTIA (Rodents)

<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	Wood mouse.	VS, CC & LT
<i>Arvicola terrestris</i>	Water vole.	VS
<i>Clethrionomys glareolus</i>	Bank vole.	VS
<i>Microtus agrestis</i>	Field vole.	VS, CC & LT
<i>Micromys minutus</i>	Harvest mouse.	CB
<i>Mus musculus</i>	House mouse.	VS
<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Brown rat.	RC & VS

Scirius carolinensis Grey squirrel. RC & VS

ORDER: CARNIVORA (Carnivores)

Mustela erminea Stoat. VS
Mustela nivalis Weasel. VS
Vulpes vulpes Red Fox. RC & VS

Key to Mammal recording method:

- CC. Cat Capture
- CB. Captive Breeding & Release Programme
- LT. Live Trap
- MH. Mole Hills
- RC. Road Casualty
- VS. Visual Sighting

The records collected for 2004 came from the Park Farm Rangers, the RSPB staff & centre's daily diary, Paul Essex, a few from Sandnats members and my own sightings and road casualties. Paul successfully live trapped at a number of valley sights.

Occasional non-specific shrew sightings were recorded, both by Valley Rangers and also RSPB staff, so probably both the common and pygmy shrew populations are remaining stable. The usual RSPB centre sightings throughout the year included red fox, weasel and hedgehog. Unfortunate road casualties and cat captures again helped to swell our records this year. Throughout the year I recorded on the M5/6 link a couple of young fox casualties and on other Valley road side verges, bodies of a very old & mangy red fox, grey squirrel & brown rat.

Rabbits have again been recorded in the Hill Top area and seem to becoming more widespread but still no sightings of hare reported. Various bat species were seen in flight on our monthly meetings throughout the summer but none was positively identified. Both noctule and pipistrelle bats appear still to be roosting in the Park Farm area.

Hedgehog, mole (hills), brown rat, grey squirrel and red fox are still the most frequently recorded mammal species seen by the visiting public with the occasional stoat and weasel identified sightings by valley Rangers. Some members still get a little confused with which is which. Don't forget the stoat is larger and has a black tip to its tail.

Many thanks to all who have contributed their sightings, small mammals are not the easiest of subjects to find, let alone identify in the field.

AJPurcell.

Sandwell Valley Harvest Mouse Breeding Programme Update.

Micromys minutus Harvest mouse

Again thanks must go to the mice! All their keepers deserve every credit for their enthusiasm and care in creating such favourable breeding conditions for these delicate animals and their young, which ultimately has made our release programme so productive. Hopefully Paul & his group will now have more opportunity to monitor their valley status now with the new live traps bought in 2004. Let's hope for another productive release year in 2005 and possibly some recapture records, but I still think this is going to be an uphill task - harvest mice are extremely difficult to monitor in the wild.

AMPHIBIA (Amphibians)

ORDER: CAUDATA (Newts)

Triturus vulgaris Smooth newt

ORDER: SALIENTIA (Frogs & toads)

Bufo bufo Common toad

Rana temporaria Common frog

ORDER: REPTILIA (Snakes & Lizards)

Natrix natrix Grass snake



With our last few winter & spring weather patterns being generally wetter and milder, the Valley's pools and streams remained at above average to high levels for most of the year with the numbers of our frogs, toads and newts definitely on the increase and reports of excellent numbers of all 3 of the above recorded amphibians, at all stages of their reproduction cycles through out the year.

Again, unfortunately no great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* adults or larvae were reported.

The Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* was unearthed in August by a Valley Ranger using a bucket digger working on a pile of bark chippings at Hill Top Farm. The snake was thought to be a fully -grown adult at 2-3ft long after the sighting it vanished back into the pile and has not been since. It was the only record of a reptile sighting in 2004; no others were received but none was anticipated.

AJPurcell.

SANDWELL VALLEY BIRD REPORT 2004

JANUARY

The long staying star attraction during the winter months was the water pipit which frequented the RSPB marsh and surrounding area. It was seen regularly throughout January and remained until late March. 3 water rails were also noted in the marsh on the 4th.

Flocks of wildfowl on FML included 40 goosander on the 1st and 55 shoveler on the 7th. 4 gadwall were present on the 2nd, a single goldeneye on the 2nd and a single ruddy duck on the 5th.

A short eared owl was seen near Hill Top golf course on the 9th. Waders seen this month at FML included 8 snipe on the 17th, a dunlin on the 18th and 37 lapwing on the 29th.

FEBRUARY

3 species of owl were recorded during February to add to January's record of short eared owl. A tawny owl was seen near Hill Top golf course on the 1st, whilst a long eared owl was found roosting on hill 60 on the 23rd. 2 little owls were also seen in the horse paddocks on the 25th. A male and female stonechat were seen near Swan Pool on the 10th. On the following day a brambling was amongst a small flock of greenfinches near FML.

15 snipe and 3 jack snipe were on the RSPB reserve on the 27th, whilst the following day saw 4 cormorants at Swan Pool.

MARCH

A little owl was seen in the horse paddocks on the 2nd. On the 7th an oystercatcher and a common gull were at FML whilst a willow tit visited the RSPB feeding station on the 10th.

Early migrants started to appear mid month with a little ringed plover arriving at FML on the 14th, 3 sand martins and a chiffchaff around FML on the 16th, a wheatear near FML on the 18th and a willow warbler, also near FML on the 19th.

2 oystercatchers were noted at FML on the 17th and stayed for several days, whilst on the 19th, 4 gadwall were present in the RSPB marsh. 2 shelduck were also at FML on the 23rd and 3 redshank were seen there on the 28th. A pair of little owls were in the horse paddocks on the 27th.

APRIL

Spring migration continued apace with returning birds being seen throughout the Valley. Noted at FML on the 3rd were 2 little ringed plover, 7+ willow warbler and a single swallow. A lesser whitethroat was near FML on the 8th and the following day a ring ouzel was seen in the

paddocks by Newton Road. Also on the 9th, a departing winter visitor in the shape of a brambling was at the RSPB feeding station, where it was seen again on the 11th.

Returning wheatears were noted in the Valley on the 11th with 3 at Forge Mill Farm. 7 sand martins and a couple of swallows were over FML on the 12th, when a sedge warbler was also noted near the lake and a grasshopper warbler was “reeling” near the scrape.

Another sighting of a ring ouzel was reported from Forge Mill Farm trail on the 13th, from where a yellowhammer was also seen. A total of 38 wheatear were counted from around the Valley on the 17th, whilst at FML, 10 common sandpiper and 3 oystercatcher were in evidence. Overhead at the same location were 100+ swallows and a mixed array of 100 or so house and sand martins. 2 redstart were seen off Salters Lane on the 18th and another was seen at the RSPB marsh. The following day a whimbrel was noted flying over FML. 2 male ruddy duck were on FML on the 21st. The following day a garden warbler was reported from near the lake. There was another sighting of ring ouzel on the 24th from the paddocks at Hill House Farm. On the same day single whinchat, grasshopper warbler and sedge warbler were seen at the RSPB scrape and a total of 7 buzzards were counted in the Valley. 200+ swift were over FML on the 27th, whilst the following day single common and arctic tern were seen at Swan Pool. 2 green sandpiper and 2 oystercatcher were at FML on the 29th, when 2 lapwing chicks were also seen on the RSPB island.

MAY

A short eared owl was found exhausted and waterlogged by FML on the 3rd. It was taken into care and released at the same site on the next day. Happily it appeared to have made a full recovery and flew off in a northerly direction.

A tree pipit was at Forge Hill on the 3rd and on the 6th a wood warbler was noted by Swan Pool sailing centre. Reed warblers had returned to the RSPB reserve by the 7th when 2 were heard in song. Also on the 7th, 3 lapwing chicks were in evidence on the RSPB island.

A hobby was seen near FML on the 9th and 2 days later a peregrine was seen at Swan Pool. A cuckoo was heard at 5-45a.m. near FML on the 16th and on the same day 5 buzzards were seen over Salters Lane. A spotted flycatcher was seen along Forge Lane on the 22nd. The same day a total of 5 lapwing chicks were counted, with 4 on RSPB island and 1 on the reserve's bund.

On the 26th, 4 little ringed plover were at FML and a greenshank was in the RSPB marsh. On the 28th a male pintail was at FML and a kingfisher was seen along the River Tame. The same day a short eared owl was seen on the RSPB reserve.

JUNE

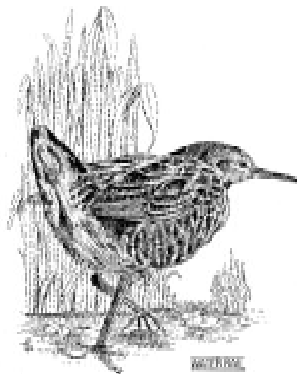
On the 9th a little grebe was seen in the RSPB marsh with 1 young. On the 12th a pied flycatcher was noted near FML, whilst on the 16th a pair of pheasants with 6 young were observed, also near FML.

A buzzard was seen being mobbed by crows over Forge Hill on the 20th. The following day a single snipe was in the RSPB marsh.

A good variety of warblers were in evidence around FML on the 22nd with the following being counted: 8 garden warbler, 6 whitethroat, 3 willow warbler, with 2 each of blackcap, chiffchaff and sedge warbler. A cormorant was also present on the lake on the same day.

2004 was another successful year for the gadwall at FML, with an adult and 7 young being seen there on the 30th.

‘Water rail’
by
Terry Parker



JULY

A little egret visited Swan Pool on the 6th and remained until the following day. This species is becoming an annual visitor to the Midlands and birds have now visited the Valley in 3 of the 4 years since the first record in 2001.

2 tufted duck broods with a total of 15 young were counted on FML on the 10th, when 2 common sandpiper were also present. A pair of ruddy duck were at Ice House Pool on the 14th.

Waders seen at FML on the 17th included green sandpiper (staying till the

24th), common sandpiper, dunlin, little ringed plover and a total of 49 lapwing. Later in the month, a black tailed godwit was at the same location on the 21st and 2 greenshank were there on the 29th.

Other visitors to the Valley this month were an arctic tern which was seen at Swan Pool on the 27th and at FML the following day, and a redstart, seen in the paddocks on the 28th.

Grey heron sightings around the Valley, and particularly Ice House Pool, suggested that the heronry has had another successful breeding season.

AUGUST

A greenshank arrived at FML on the 1st and remained there till the 10th. A Mediterranean gull also arrived at FML on the same day, but had departed by the 3rd. Also on the 1st, a willow tit was heard calling near the RSPB centre. 3 green sandpiper were at FML on the 3rd, when a ringed plover was also seen in the RSPB marsh, and a redshank was at Swan Pool.

A flock of 47 common terns was counted flying over Swan Pool on the 10th. On the same day an oystercatcher and a dunlin were present on the RSPB island at FML. Unusual visitors to the RSPB marsh were 4 red crested pochard on the 12th and a black tailed godwit on the following day.

A common scoter turned up at Swan Pool on the 18th, remaining there till the 20th. A quail was heard at Hill Top on the 19th, with another possible record from the same location on the 31st. 6 spotted flycatchers were in the paddocks on the 20th, and 3 more were noted on the RSPB reserve on the 24th.

3 goosanders made an early return to FML, being noted there on the 28th. A short eared owl was seen near Newton Road on the 31st, when 2 male redstarts were also seen near Swan Pool.

SEPTEMBER

Several fortunate observers were treated to the sight of an osprey flying east over the FML area at 11-00 a.m. on the 1st. On the 4th, another sighting of short eared owl was made flying low over grassland near the RSPB reserve.

The first sighting of a Mediterranean gull which turned out to be a long stayer, was made at FML on the 6th. Although often elusive, the bird continued to be seen amongst black headed gulls into December. A buzzard was seen along the farm trail at Forge Mill Farm on the 8th. 2 days later, on the 10th, a marsh tit was observed on a feeder at the RSPB reserve, returning again on the 11th and 12th.

On the 12th, a little egret was seen at a small pool in the paddocks off Newton Road. Also on the 12th, a single golden plover was on the RSPB island at FML and a yellow wagtail was at Swan Pool.

A juvenile black tern was at FML on the 17th. On the 23rd a black necked grebe arrived at FML, staying till the 25th. On the 26th it had moved to Swan Pool but was not then seen again.

A marsh tit was again seen at the RSPB reserve on the 29th and continued to visit through into November, sometimes being observed on the feeding station.

OCTOBER

A tree sparrow was a welcome visitor to the RSPB feeding station on the 8th. On the 9th a trio of sandwich terns were seen flying north over FML. The following day, a roost of over 200 starlings was noted in the RSPB marsh.

Single female goldeneye and ruddy duck were at FML on the 12th. On the same day 5 snipe were seen near Salters Lane. On the 13th, 3 stonechat were by Swan Pool and the following day a water rail was seen by the observation platform at FML.

A jack snipe was observed in the RSPB marsh on the 20th. On the 24th, a tawny owl was seen at Park Farm car park at 6-15p.m. Finally for October, a flock of 128 wigeon were on FML on the 31st.

NOVEMBER

A total of 10 water rail were seen around the Valley on the 6th, with 5 occurring in the RSPB marsh, 1 on the scrape, 2 on North Island, and singles from Swan Pool island and a stream on Hill Top golf course. On the 10th, a little owl was heard calling from the horse paddocks.

During mid-month a marsh tit was again seen around the RSPB reserve on several occasions and was noted on the feeding station on the 16th, whilst on the 19th a willow tit was noted at Forge Mill Farm. The Mediterranean gull was again present at FML on the 21st, and the same day a woodcock was seen just off Newton Road.

On the 24th, a flock of 20 redpoll were counted near North Island, and 8 gadwall were present on FML on the 29th. At the same location on the 30th, a total of 44 lapwing were seen.

DECEMBER

The long staying Mediterranean gull continued to linger at FML and was seen on the slipway there on the 1st. Also at FML on the 1st were 14 snipe. An oystercatcher made a fleeting visit to FML on the 2nd, whilst on the 4th, 2 ring necked parakeets were seen near the RSPB centre.

A woodcock was seen at Forge Mill Farm on the 11th. On the 13th a total of 27 snipe were counted around the FML area, and the same day saw 27 goosander on the lake.

A female smew arrived on the pool at Dartmouth Park on the 14th, staying till the 16th. This was the first record in the Valley since 1995.

On the 17th, a total of 75 lapwing were present on the newly re-profiled RSPB island at FML.



‘Waxwing’ by Steve Welch

The highlight of the month had to be the sighting on the 23rd, of approximately 20 waxwings which were seen briefly, feeding on rowan berries on Lodge Hill. By the time word had got around, they had unfortunately moved on, nevertheless this was the first sighting of the species in the Valley since 1991.

Thanks to staff at the RSPB reserve, contributors to their log book and everyone else who provided records for this report.

Paul Smith

Sandwell Valley Botany & Conservation Report 2004

February

The Snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis* population in the Valley continues to increase and during a February walk around the Valley John Shrimpton discovered six clumps from John’s Wood, three from Priory Wood, eight around Cypress Pool, seven in the Ha-ha and one in Camp Lane.

April

On the 25th of the month a visit by John to the Wildflower Meadow near Forge Lane rewarded him with eight cowslip plants *Primula veris* and two fritillary *Fritilaria meleagris*, the latter probably seeded from the original planting on the island outside Hill Top Golf Course entrance.

May

The weekend activities at the RSPB reserve in early May saw members of Sandnats actively involved. Included in the itinerary was a Wildflower Walk around Forge Mill Lake. Near the Centre a large patch of bugle *Ajuga reptans* was admired in full flower. This species is generally uncommon in Birmingham and the Black Country and appears to be absent from the rest of Sandwell Valley. Nearby a patch of hedge bedstraw *Galium mollugo* was growing amongst several stands of fodder burnet *Sanguisorba minor ssp. muricata*, the latter being one of the species introduced with a grass mix in the early days of the reserve and now a well established part of the local flora. Several small trees of apple *Malus domestica* were flowering and it is intriguing to know whether they may have originated from the pips of apple cores casually discarded by visitors. In the retaining brickwork of the banks of the R Tame near the footbridge to Forge Mill car park, hundreds of flowering plants of Cornsalad *Valerianella sp* had turned the bank into a haze of pale-blue. Elsewhere, the banks of the river are turned into a mosaic of yellow and white at this time of the year as thousands of wild turnip *Brassica rapa ssp campestris* and cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* follow the path of the river on its journey through Sandwell Valley. Another umbel which succeeds cow parsley, the poisonous hemlock *Conium maculatum* frequents the banks of the Tame in this area and it can easily be distinguished by its characteristic purple-blotched stem and later flowering. A large patch of marsh marigold was observed fairly low-down on the riverbank and it is hard to imagine how it clings on when the river is in full flood. Near the RSPB Visitor's Centre a fine specimen of Swedish whitebeam *Sorbus intermedia* was displaying its racemes of white flowers, an event lasting for only a few short days during early May. The wych elm *Ulmus glabra* nearby, were well into seed, having flowered during the cold short-days during the early part of the year.

June

New additions to the Valley flora are always welcome and I was delighted to find two within a few metres of each other. A large patch of an alien grass, California brome *Ceratochloa carinata*, was discovered growing along the hedgerow in Ray Hall Lane near to the junction with Wigmore Lane. This is very uncommon locally with only one previous entry in EcoRecord. Nearby, the water crowfoot colonising vast stretches of the River Tame was determined as river water-crowfoot *Ranunculus fluitans*, a highly specialised member of the buttercup family thriving in

fast-flowing water but rarely seen in flower in this area - a useful record. A third new species to the Valley was discovered at the end of the month growing along the path in the RSPB wildflower garden. Hoary plantain *Plantago media* is usually associated with calcareous soils and the solitary plant discovered was a welcome if not surprising late edition to the flora of the reserve.

July

The July Sandnats meeting was held in the Wildflower Meadow near Forge Lane and involved members gaining hands-on experience in botanical survey techniques. They were split up into groups of three and equipped with notepaper, pencils and various pieces of equipment painstakingly constructed earlier by Mike Bloxham.

A 'Frame Quadrat' was dropped at random and a percentage of the frequency of occurrence of each species present within was made. This was repeated ten times and from the results a prediction of the most dominant species was made.

A ten metre 'Line Transect' was stretched out from the small pool to a dry spot in the meadow and species found below it in one-metre sections were recorded. From this we could see how species preferring the permanent damp conditions found in and near the pool soon become displaced by plants favouring the much drier conditions found in the meadow. It was interesting to note that the patch of Japanese iris *Iris japonica* which was planted in the pool several years ago had now grown into a much larger clump and was the dominant species.

The third piece of equipment used was a 'Point Quadrat'. This consisted of a cane pushed into the ground with a horizontal bar containing ten holes, which allowed a knitting needle to be passed through them and down on to the foliage below. The first plant contacted was recorded and repeated through the other nine holes. From this we could determine the canopy shade species influencing the light getting to others below. This procedure was carried out in different areas of the meadow to determine height-dominant species.

Finally an assessment of the age of the sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* trees were made by taking an average measurement of the girth of the tree at breast height and examining each tree and deciding into which category they fall using 'The Veteran Trees Initiative Chart' which Mike had supplied. Our estimations put the trees into the 'early to late ancient stage'.

Although our efforts were far from conclusive due to our limited time in

the meadow we decided that red clover *Trifolium pratense*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, hawkweed *hieracium sp*, and bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* are amongst the dominant species along with grasses false-oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, common bent *Agrostis* and creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*.

On an earlier visit to this meadow John Shrimpton had counted one hundred and forty four common-spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsia* showing a marked increase on the previous year.

After two years of survey work, the 'Flora of the RSPB Sandwell Valley', was published. This is the most comprehensive study of the reserve's flora carried out to date and involved visits at different times of the year to ensure that as little as possible was missed. The number of species recorded within the reserve is a reflection of the diversity of habitats present within a small area and some interesting comparisons could be made with the two previous recordings of 1985 and 1993.

August

An examination of the flora of North Island in Forge Mill Lake revealed good stands of meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, trifid bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita* and large-flowered evening-primrose *Oenothera glazioviana*. At least eight individual plants of twiggy mullein *Verbascum virgatum* occur in the northern end of the island, a species not seen in the Valley since 1990. Plans to clear the island of much of the vegetation were abandoned after this discovery and it was decided the botanically rich northern end of the island should only have willows coppiced and some of the bramble cut back with most of the clearance occurring in the southern end, the part largely dominated by bramble and willow.

It appears we have a new botanical record for Sandwell Valley from the garden of Mike and Hazel Bloxham. Several plants of common evening-primrose *Oenothera biennis* regularly make an appearance in their garden. All evening-primrose species naturalised in Britain originate from North America and hybridise readily. This small colony is isolated from other plants and probably breeds true. Common evening-primrose is certainly not common in our area, the plant most often encountered in Sandwell Valley being large-flowered evening-primrose *O glazioviana*. Another garden in St-John's Close revealed an abundance of meadow barley *Hordeum secalinum* forming the majority of the sward of the front lawn. It is an uncommon grass in our area and is usu-

ally associated with damp, rich soils and has previously been recorded only once in the Valley. Lack of garden maintenance for a few weeks had enabled it to flower along with the rest of the lawn weeds.

September

The Sandwell Valley Rangers have undertaken much clearance work on the island in Swan Pool to encourage ground-nesting birds to use the island. The area involved is home to the largest population of southern marsh-orchids in the Valley with an estimation of around two-hundred plants. A small area containing sphagnum moss was detected during the work and may disappear now the vegetation that shaded it has been cleared.

Overall the orchid population in the Valley has never looked healthier, although I cannot comment on bee orchids this year, as neither of the two prime sites at Ray Hall sewage works and Dartmouth Meadow were visited. However I have reports that ten plants occurred along the bank of Forge Mill Lake, the other site from which it is regularly seen.

Another two new species for the Valley were detected this month. Three patches of marjoram *Origanum vulgare* were growing alongside the path from Park Farm car park to St-John's Close and several plants of black bent *Agrostis gigantea* were discovered in the hedgerow near Park Farm. Towards the end of the month several individual plants of broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* were located in Park Farm wood growing very near to the path. This orchid is easily overlooked and may be more frequent than we realise.

October

The flora of John's Pool and its surrounding woodland was examined and it is apparent that the solitary patch of sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum* discovered by John Shrimpton some years ago is on the increase as three more patches now occur on the opposite bank of the pool. A large clump of common dog-violet *Viola riviniana* was noted alongside one of the water-filled trenches running into the pool, a species encountered very rarely elsewhere in the Valley. The heavy shading in this area has almost eliminated the aquatic flora but a small quantity of broad-leaved pondweed and a solitary marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* still cling on. Planned clearance work may be beneficial for their future survival. Near the entrance to King George playing fields there were hundreds of plants of pink purslane *Claytonia sibirica* thriving in semi-shade beneath the tree plantation.

During this month a most significant botanical discovery was made and I have commented on it in greater detail in the previous bulletin. Several well-established patches of floating pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* were detected growing on the duck pond to the rear of Park Farm buildings. This species has recently been classified as a notifiable red-alert species and joins New Zealand pygmyweed *Crassula helmsii*, Japanese knotweed *Falopia japonica*, Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* and giant hogweed *Heraclium mantegazzianum*. In Sandwell Valley we now have all five species to a greater or lesser extent. Floating pennywort has the capabilities of very quickly colonising areas of open water and it is imperative that it does not spread to other water bodies in the Valley. During the winter months steps to eradicate it will have been taken and hopefully this plant will disappear before it has a chance to get a hold!

Recording work on a proposed 'Flora for Birmingham and the Black Country' entered its eighth recording season. It is hoped that all monads within the recording area will be finished within the next two years. Virtually all of the recording-work to the north, south and west of the Valley has been completed, leaving the majority of the uncovered squares in the eastern part of the region.

Sandwell Valley new botanical records 2004

- Ranunculaceae** *Ranunculus fluitans* river water-crowfoot / River Tame, throughout
Lamiaceae *Origanum vulgare* marjoram / in vegetation at side of path from St-John's Close to Park Farm car park / three plants
Plantaginaceae *Plantago media* hoary plantain / RSPB reserve / alongside path in wildflower garden / one
Onagraceae *Oenothera biennis* common evening-primrose / rear garden of 1 St-John's Close / several
Apiaceae *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* floating pennywort / duck pond to the rear of Park Farm buildings / extensive colonies
Poaceae *Agrostis gigantea* black bent / plantation near Park Farm buildings / several

Poaceae *Ceratochloa carinata* California brome / Ray Hall Lane / large patch

Twiggy is Alive and Doing Well!

Mulleins belong to the *Scrophulariaceae* family and include familiar plants such as foxgloves and speedwells. They are mainly biennials or at best short-lived perennials and are all quite showy plants. Many are garden-worthy and regularly seen in herbaceous borders. Some species

grow to well in excess of two metres in height, and possess many branching flower-spikes and large, densely-hairy leaves. The flowering period is long, extending from the end of June through to September and beyond, depending on the season. The majority of mullein species found in this country, both native and introduced, are yellow-flowered. Occasionally purple or violet-flowered plants are encountered. Seeds are very small in comparison to the eventual size of the mature plant, and are produced profusely. They are long-lived and capable of surviving in the soil for many years.

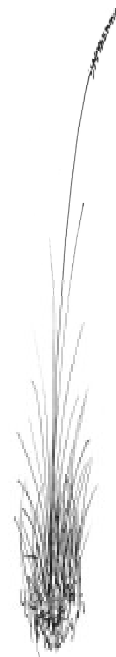
According to Stace's Flora the native sites of twiggy mullein *Verbascum virgatum* in Britain are Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Elsewhere it is considered to be a rare casual plant and unlikely to persist for more than a year or two. The solitary Valley record for this species dates back almost fifteen years to 1990, when Bob Normand reported an unusual mullein which was later confirmed as twiggy mullein. It was growing near the path running alongside the River Tame opposite the RSPB Reserve. I have checked the status of this species on EcoRecord, and as far as I am aware there are only two records for the whole of the Birmingham and Black Country conurbation, and the Valley record is one of them, so it is obviously a very rare plant in our area.

With this in mind, it came as a surprise to discover a small thriving colony of what appeared to be this species on the island at the northern end of Forge Mill Lake whilst conducting a survey with Sandwell Council's Wildspace! Officer, Jo Miskin, in early September. A sample was sent to the BSBI referee for *Verbascums*, Mr V Johnstone who lives in Whitchurch, Hampshire, he is also the holder of the NCCPG National Collection of the *Verbascum* family. His reply indicated that our plants are almost certainly *V virgatum* (he never commits himself 100%) In all five flowering plants were noted along with several non-flowering basal rosettes, which hopefully will provide flowering plants next year. All were confined to a small area of gravel bank at the northern end of the island. The flowering spike of twiggy mullein is solitary and does not branch. Flowers are yellow and 20-30mm across, appearing sporadically up the stem at random as they develop. Each flower has five stamens, the filaments clothed with violet-coloured hairs. Flowers are short-stalked and range from one to five flowers from each bract axil. The plants I examined had only one flower at each node. Leaves of this species are green and not

felty or grey looking, and are not densely-hairy, however the whole plant is covered with stalked glands which are particularly noticeable in the upper parts of the plant. They were growing in an open aspect with little competition from more aggressive species. Nearby were several plants of the more familiar great mullein *Verbascum thapsus*. The protection gained from growing on an island with little disturbance, and without threat of being vandalised or removed, are possible reasons for its survival. This small colony of plants is easily visible from the bank of Forge Mill Lake, and now that we are aware of its presence it should be relatively easy to monitor it in the future. There is no knowing how long plants have been on the island as no previous survey work has taken place here, but we can now annually check on their welfare and hopefully retain the species for many years to come.

LIST OF PLANTS FOUND ON THE ISLAND

<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	yarrow
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	alder
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	cow parsley
<i>Apium nodiflorum</i>	fool's parsley
<i>Artemisia absinthum</i>	wormwood
<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	mugwort
<i>Atriplex patula</i>	common orache
<i>Bidens tripartita</i>	trifid bur-marigold
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	shepherd's-purse
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	common knapweed
<i>Centaurium erythraea</i>	common centaury
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	common mouse-ear
<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>	rosebay willowherb
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	creeping thistle
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	spear thistle
<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	field bindweed
<i>Conyza canadensis</i>	Canadian fleabane
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	smooth hawk's-beard
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	tufted hair-grass
<i>Dipsacus fullonum</i>	wild teazel
<i>Elytrigia repens</i>	common couch
<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	great willowherb
<i>Epilobium parviflorum</i>	hoary willowherb
<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	meadowsweet
<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	fennel
<i>Galium aparine</i>	cleavers
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	sunflower
<i>Hypericum maculatum</i>	imperforate st. john's-wort
<i>Hypericum tetrapterum</i>	square-stalked st. john's-wort



<i>Juncus inflexus</i>	hard rush
<i>Lamium album</i>	white dead-nettle
<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	meadow vetchling
<i>Lemna minor</i>	common duckweed
<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>	common toadflax
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	common bird's-foot-trefoil
<i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>	large bird's-foot-trefoil
<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>	ragged robin
<i>Lycopus europaeus</i>	gipsywort
<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	purple loosestrife
<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	black medick
<i>Mentha aquatica</i>	water mint
<i>Myosotis scorpiodes</i>	water forget-me-not
<i>Oenothera glazioviana</i>	large-flowered evening-primrose
<i>Oenothera sp.</i>	(possibly a hybrid)
<i>Persicaria hydropiper</i>	water-pepper
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	ribwort plantain
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	selfheal
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	creeping buttercup
<i>Rorippa amphibia</i>	greater yellow-cress
<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>	bramble
<i>Rumex conglomeratus</i>	clustered dock
<i>Scrophularia auriculata</i>	water figwort
<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>	common figwort
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	common ragwort
<i>Solidago canadensis</i>	Canadian golden-rod
<i>Sonchus asper</i>	prickly sow-thistle
<i>Symphytum x uplandicum</i>	russian comfrey
<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>	tansy
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	red clover
<i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i>	scentless mayweed
<i>Veronica virgatum</i>	twiggy mullein
<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	great mullein
<i>Veronica beccabunga</i>	brooklime
<i>Vicia cracca</i>	tufted vetch
<i>Vicia hirsuta</i>	hairy tare
<i>Vicia sativa subsp. segetalis</i>	common vetch
<u>Trees and shrubs</u>	
<i>Alnus italica</i>	Italian alder
<i>Betula pendula</i>	silver birch
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	dogwood
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	broom
<i>Salix caprea</i>	goat willow
<i>Salix cinerea</i>	grey willow
<i>Salix fragilis</i>	crack willow

M. Poulton



Entomology Report

Unfortunately my duties have prevented me from doing any work in the Valley at all this year, but thanks to the efforts of others, a few new records have been accumulated. The discovery of Roesel's bush cricket on the RSPB reserve (near the building) by John Loach in late summer provided us with our first record for the family. This Nationally Notable insect appears to have been spreading northward and 2004 was an exceptional year for it with a number of Warwickshire sightings. A first record for Staffordshire, the smart yellow markings on this insect make it easy to recognise. It is likely that one or two other cricket species are present here but have eluded us so far.

The second uncommon insect was the small pyralid moth *Euzophera cinerosella*. This is a very scarce insect in the region and tends to be associated with coastal areas. The foodplant is wormwood so this insect joins a select band of others that feed on *Artemisia* species. It came to light on one of the moth nights at the RSPB (14/07/01) and we are indebted to Dr Tony Simpson (Worcestershire moth recorder) for identifying it. Tony Wood and I hope to publish the Lepidoptera of the Sandwell Valley (several hundred species) in a special bulletin in 2006 or 2007.

At this juncture I have decided to publish conservation notes on the rare and notable crickets & moths currently recorded for the valley so the information may be taken into consideration when management operations are undertaken. Readers are reminded that statuses are changed at intervals as more knowledge becomes available. **Two species, one of which may shortly be on a national BAP list, require special attention because the protection of our older trees is a factor in ensuring their retention in the area.**

British Red Data Book species

P.RDB1

Species falling in this category have a provisional 'Endangered' label. There is insufficient information to absolutely assess their status but the evidence in the shape of scarcity of sightings / restricted habitat requirements etc, suggests that they could soon become extinct in Britain.

Lepidoptera

Aplota palpella

Provisional National Moth BAP Conservation Species

This is a micro moth very occasionally recorded in Britain. The specimen was captured in St John's Close (house adjoining Europa Copse- an area of mature oak woodland). The specimen is in the Staffordshire collection of the late R.G. Warren .

Conservation suggestions

The moth breeds in moss on the bark of trees. Old orchard trees, oaks etc. have harboured populations according to the literature. Single old trees in the open are noted as hosts on occasions. The presence of this species probably reinforces the general principle of protecting older mature trees in the vicinity of the Farm and in conservation areas, because they may harbour some very special relict species. Older and larger mature trees especially singles in the paddocks around the Priory Wood area ought to be protected from damage by grazing horses & cattle so their lives can be prolonged. Pollarding of some older trees rather than felling ought also be contemplated when the need arises. Standing old timber is invariably more valuable as habitat than fallen trunks because the latter are soon consumed and lost.

Reference mentioning this capture.

Emmet et al. (2002) **The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland** Harley Books (pp. 294) Vol.4. Part 1. page 96.

Notable N.

Species of insects which are estimated to occur within the range of 16 to 100 modern 10 km squares. The categories Na and Notable/B are combined under the heading 'Notable' in this review.

This is a large section with some 80 species due for consideration. This revision deals only with the Crickets and moths.

Orthoptera

Metrioptera roeselii . **Roesel's bush cricket**

Newly discovered in 2004 this is a significant addition to the Valley Fauna. It is characteristic of scrub areas and woodland fringes and is predominantly southern in distribution. It is easily recognised by a combination of long antennae and striking yellow markings along the side of the body. John Loach (RSPB volunteer) discovered the insect.



Roesel's bush cricket—specimen caught on RSPB reserve
© Andy Purcell

Conservation suggestions

Maintain the light scrub areas currently existing in Forge Mill- RSPB reserve surrounds area without allowing development to mature woodland. Monitor annually for this unusual insect.

Lepidoptera.

As a group of insects probably more extensively studied in recent history than most others and by more entomologists, the rarity data ought to be given particular significance.

***Synanthedon vespiformis* (red-legged clearwing moth).**

Found on a veteran sweet chestnut in the paddock close to Forge Lane and the power line, whilst it explored the bark .

The clearwings bear striking resemblance to wasps and may be mistaken for them at first sight until the strange erratic flight and other behaviour betrays them. The species here has a historically widespread distribution in England, but has apparently become far less common than was once the case. Characteristic of woodland, it apparently oviposits in fresh oak stumps but will also choose excrescences on the trunks of other trees such as beech & sweet chestnut. In the absence of the moths, it is possible to establish the presence of clearwings by examining the lower parts of

tree trunks for exit holes with isolated protruding empty pupal cases.

Conservation suggestions.

The discovery of 'clearwing trees' is a matter of some significance. Most species are now rare and therefore steps need to be taken to ensure continuity of the habitat. The suggestion is that the tree concerned here is tagged (possibly as a part of a programme of tagging a number of selected mature trees in the Valley) and that a barrier in the shape of a small pole and wire fence is wound round the trunk to protect the bark from further damage from grazing animals. This practice might well apply to the other mature trees in this paddock, which entomological studies suggest is probably relict pasture woodland- although now of much reduced quality. The presence of a rare weevil in the grassland around the tree (notes to follow) provides one clue both that 'improvement' has not been a significant factor in recent times and also that chemicals of any description ought not to be used in the paddock.



Red- legged clearwing

Crambus pratella

This little grass moth is local on rather dry grassy pastures where the turf is short.

Conservation suggestions

Found on the R.S.P.B. reserve, it is likely to find the current management regime, with its emphasis on shrub control and meadowland preservation, to its liking. The heavily used paths by the lake have broad short verges and so all looks well for this moth.

Euzophera cinerosella

A small pyralid moth very secretive in its habits. Breeds in rootstock of *Artemisia absinthium*

Conservation suggestions

Found on the R.S.P.B. reserve, it is likely to find the current management regime, with its emphasis on shrub control and meadowland preservation, to its liking, provided that the foodplant is left to grow in wastes on and around the reserve. Whenever clearance or control of tall herb is being contemplated, a good component of this plant should be retained.

Furucula bicuspis

Alder Kitten

Recorded at the light trap of R. & A. Normand in their garden on the East fringe of the Sandwell Valley.

Conservation suggestions.

This moth was taken in a garden with a good wildlife area including birch and alder (larval foodplants). It is very probably found nearby in the open conservation areas by the river and the golf course where an abundance of these trees (many mature) exists. At present there is no threat likely to bring habitat change to the immediate locality - a situation which probably suits the moth and needs to persist.

Cucullia absinthii

The wormwood.

At the same locality as the Alder Kitten.

Conservation suggestions.

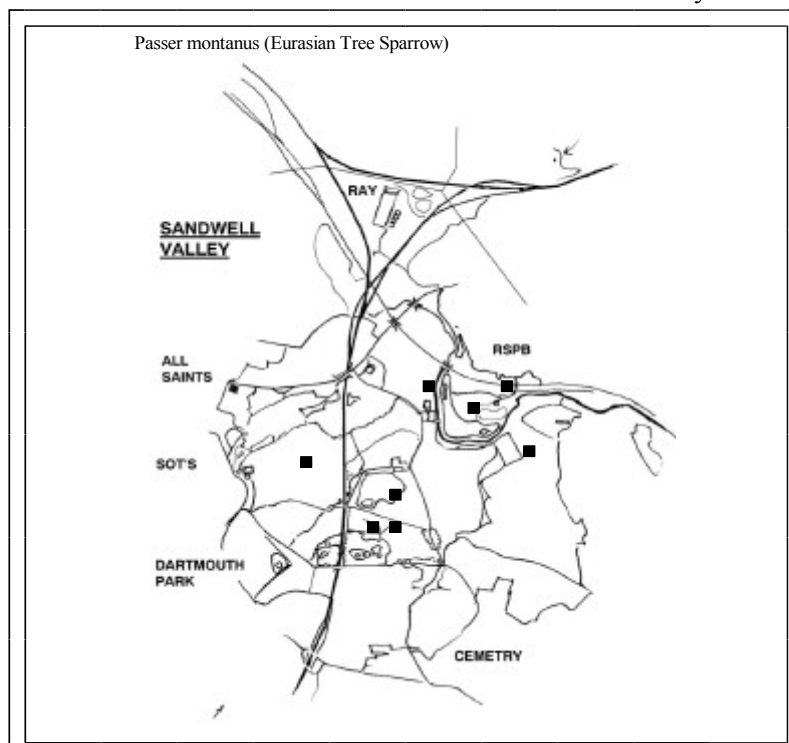
Wormwood and Mugwort, the foodplants of this moth, are characteristic of the tall herb areas in wastes and garden fringes throughout the Sandwell Valley and its environs. Several very local insects using these foodplants have already been recorded locally and the presence of the moth is an additional pointer to suggest the success of biodiversity retention by not 'tidying up' or spraying natural vegetation in the locality.

Mike Bloxham

Mapmate & Recording

Thanks to Tony Wood for replying to my query on bird species missing from the Priory Wood list in the last edition. He added red-crested

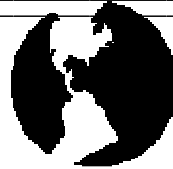
pochard, lesser black backed gull, turtle dove, swallow and house martin. I am now using the Mapmate Recording Package to show distribution of some Valley species. Here is a sample. The process does take time and sadly 'cemetery' is wrongly spelt on my map file !! The whole is constructed using tracings from an Ordnance Survey map because originals are copyright. Mapmate will accept these files & calibrate them. This takes time, but transfer of our records to the system requires much more! Full reference lists for sites, recorders and determiners have to be constructed. This has to be done with care to ensure uniformity of entry.



The Bulletin was written by Lynn and Mike Poulton, Paul Essex, Paul Smith, Andy Purcell, Cath & Bob Mansell , Mike Bloxham and Tony Wood.

The colour photo at the front is, as usual, the work of Andy Purcell and features the grass snake – our first definite record since the formation of the Club.

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But if you search on 'SANDNATS' you'll easily find it!

**THE CLUB IS GRATEFUL TO BILL MOODIE & CLARE HINCHLIFFE FOR MAIN-
TAINING THIS WEBSITE**

There is no fungus report in this edition because the next number will be devoted to a review of the fungi of the Valley.

It is probable that the editor will be away at the time when the November edition of the bulletin is due out, so an assistant to help in the production will be much appreciated.

STAFFORDSHIRE TRUST HEADQUARTERS

THIS YEAR WE ARE HAVING A TALK ABOUT THE TRUST. WHY NOT VISIT THE BUILDING & GROUNDS BEFORE THAT EVENT? THEY ARE USUALLY OPEN AND ARE EASILY LOCATED BY THE GARDEN CENTRE AT WOLSELEY BRIDGE NEAR SHUGBOROUGH (TEL 01889 508534).