

Sandnats



ANNUAL REPORT

BULLETIN OF THE SANDWELL VALLEY NATURALISTS' CLUB

VOL. 28 NO.2 March 2006

SANDNATS BULLETIN



**Terry Parker's picture celebrates
2005– the 'year of the fungus' !**



Volume 28 No. 2 MARCH 2006

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)**
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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

As usual I have to thank a number of people for support in production of the bulletin during the year. Andy Purcell has continued to give us high quality photographs and his assistance during production of the Fungus volume was much appreciated. Bill Moodie's meticulous manuscript ensured that most of the difficulties encountered centred on presentation of the final work to best effect. My thanks have to go the Committee for allowing some financial leeway in printing costs and my apologies must go to the membership for loss of one SANDNATS number. The year's efforts have involved a new printing firm (KallKwik) and have shown that it is possible to produce a manageable 68 page bulletin.

As you will have noticed, there has been delay in preparing the next 'special series' publication on Pond & Stream life. This is a wide-ranging and in many ways more difficult project to bring to fruition because potential authors are at present busy on other projects. Such special series publications are normally produced with the guidance of a sub-committee and have larger print runs.

As an interim measure I have adopted the plan of having a 'mini' special series included in the ordinary run of bulletins. These will be devoted either to smaller groups of plants or animals and studies connected with them, or to special site studies, or to larger but difficult groups where enough Valley information currently exists to provide a valuable read for an audience. The fungus book can be taken as an example of this. The Butterflies and Moths are likely to be a future mini series target. If you would like to devote a whole Bulletin to a wildlife topic you consider important, the committee will be delighted to consider your proposal.

This year we shall be using some space to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the RSPB Reserve in the Valley and also to give wider coverage to our own thirty years. The two 2006 editions to come will cover some lesser-known aspects of the SANDNATS story during that period as well as incorporating some special articles currently being worked on by authors. Discussion on matters with regard to normal bulletin content is also ongoing. Margaret Shuker has done an excellent job in giving provisional reports for meetings (and full ones also on occasions), but the burden of her other work as Secretary means that she cannot devote the further time necessary to prepare complete & detailed articles on all of them. Without these, future readers will be left in the dark about a number of interesting aspects of the Club's story. A few members have been able to help provide some extra coverage in this edition. Who else will have a go?

CHAIRMANS' REPORT

The last year has just flown past. It doesn't seem as though 12 months have gone by since I was doing the last report for 2004. Our indoor and outdoor meetings were mostly well attended, with two trips arranged to sites outside the West Midlands, one to Thor's Cave and the other to Dolydd Hafren. The weather could have been kinder on both occasions, but often seems to frown on SANDNATS! In spite of conditions, members who attended had enjoyable days out. November saw the publication of the 'Fungi of the Sandwell Valley' by William Moodie. This is another well-executed publication by the Club, and thanks must also go to Andy Purcell for the collating of the photographs and Mike Bloxham for putting everything together and arranging the printing. The book is dedicated to the late John Little, and the West Bromwich Institute (of which John was also a member) made a donation to assist us towards the cost of colour photographs in the central pages. During the year Joe Miskin has set up a 'Friends of Sot's Hole' association. So far only two meetings have been arranged, so we will have to wait and see what transpires. Congratulations to Lee Copplestone on being appointed as new Manager of the RSPB Reserve during 2005. He has always been a good friend to the Club as was Colin Horne, the previous holder of the post. Finally on a more sombre note, most members will know that Bob Mansell passed away at the end of last year and Arthur Powell died this January. Bob used to do the yearly weather reports for the Annual Report. Our thoughts go out to his wife Cath and family and also to Rosa Powell, her daughter and family.

Tony Wood.



The Sandwell Valley Naturalists' Club

Statement of Income and expenditure for the Year to 31 December 2005

<u>Income</u>	2005	2004
Membership & visitors	424	388
Donations	226	6
Garden Party	...	203
Sundry Receipts --		
Refreshments	29	20
Raffles	86	28
Sale of nuts, seeds etc	..	6
Sale of Flora	..	67
Sale of Wildlife of S.V.	<u>..</u>	<u>9</u>
	115	130
Annual Dinner	176	186
Severn Trent Water – net dividend	118	...
Bank Interest – net	4	3
Sale of Birds of the Sandwell Valley	379	56
Sundry Sales at Sandwell Show	<u>...</u>	<u>90</u>
	1442	1062
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Room Rental	175	150
Printing, Stationery & Postage	204	464
Fungi of Sandwell Valley	<u>666</u>	
	870	
BTCV Membership	30	25
Insurance	<u>156</u>	<u>169</u>
	186	194
Wildlife Trust Fee	28	28
Annual Dinner	184	197
Lecturers' fees & Donations	170	100
Sundry Expenses– Lloyds TSB Registration		
Fee re transfer & eventual sale of shares	46	...
Website Domain Registration (2 years)	<u>...</u>	<u>16</u>
	1659	1149
<u>Excess of expenditure over Income for the year to 31 December 2005</u>	<u>(£217)</u>	<u>(£87)</u>

Net proceeds from sale of 95 Severn Trent Ordinary shares

903

£686

We have prepared this Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2005 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 2006.

The Sandwell Valley Naturalists' Club

Cash Account

Balances at 31 December 2004	£	
Yorkshire Bank Current Account		920.82
Monthly Premium Account		<u>4509.81</u>
		5430.63
Less: Excess of Expenditure over income for The year		<u>217.05</u>
		5213.58
Add: Net proceeds from sale of 95 Severn Trent Ordinary Shares		<u>902.93</u>
		<u>6116.51</u>

Represented by:

Yorkshire Bank Current Account		811.33
Less: Reserve for Secretary's expenses	94.17	
Room Rental (2002)	<u>105.00</u>	<u>199.17</u>
		612.66

Yorkshire Bank Monthly Premium Account		<u>5504.35</u>
		<u>6116.51</u>

Note

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	428	2609.85
Stock in hand	<u>514</u> at cost	1670.50
	<u>1000</u>	
Profit on sales to date		<u>1218.85</u>
		<u>4468.85</u>
		<u>4468.85</u>

Arthur William Powell (1920 – 2006)



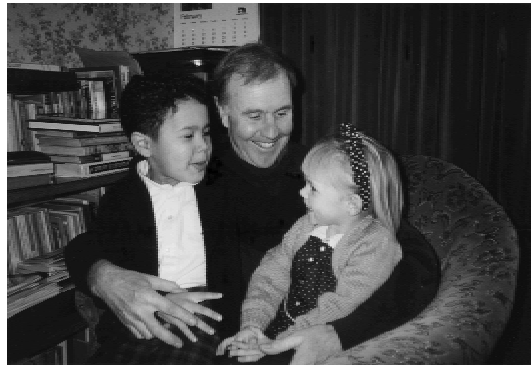
Arthur and Rosa were regularly in attendance at most SANDNATS events during the final two decades of the last century, during which time they were the most amiable people you could wish to meet, supporting each other and exchanging all sorts of information connected with wildlife. Arthur was a real addict of the natural world. He had caught it during his boyhood, especially from his father and as a local lad he discovered all he could about Warley Abbey and roamed the estate. This led him to a lifelong interest in what was left after it had gone and he was a great supporter of local activity groups connected with the Woods and Park. Thanks to their efforts over many years, the Warley Woods Community Trust has now been formed. His interest in birds had always been considerable and one of his SANDNATS articles describes a night of one of the great air raids on Birmingham with all its attendant pyrotechnics and damage. He heard another great commotion in Warley Park the next morning- but this time it was made by scores of birds mobbing a long-eared owl!

Arthur had several special attributes. He was a most gifted mechanical engineer and his talents saw him retained for many years at Birmingham University in that department where he helped many a postgraduate with the all-important projects and dissertations. This skill was also used to assemble highly sensitive equipment that was used to record the natural world – we regularly heard some beautiful recordings of bird song. One of his final projects for the Club was to be the construction of a sophisticated bat detector, which declining health and the passage of time did not allow him to complete.

Probably one of the abiding memories of Arthur will be his wood carvings of wildlife. These were a regular feature of the indoor meetings of the time, when members would be encouraged to ‘bring something

along'. During recent years ill health visited both Rosa and Arthur and they were unable to attend Club meetings with any regularity. After a most enjoyable Christmas at Malvern when he was able to rejoice in the achievements of his grandchildren, Arthur finally passed away peacefully on January 18th, having battled bravely during three long years of terminal illness. He leaves behind his beloved wife and daughter Gill with her family. We extend to all of them our deepest sympathy.

Bob Mansell



Members will notice a significant omission from this number. The weather report. It is unlikely that anyone is going to produce so distinctive a contribution in the future because its author was unique in so many respects- 'March 3rd. Listened to the weather forecast telling me to expect a mild, sunny day so I decided to ride towards the Clee Hills. The day was overcast, breezy and not mild but I did see my first skylark of the year at Alveley and a dead badger at the roadside.'

A search through the archives shows that Cath Mansell was one of the very first members of the Club in 1975, but we soon learnt from her that Bob was going to appear very infrequently, because nearly all his time was spent in cycling duties with the youngsters of Sandwell! This was to be the continuing story, but he was determined to make a contribution whenever possible. He had a gift for entertaining writing- 'The beginner's second attempt at bird watching (or the wild duck chase)' in the November 1983 bulletin, was a wonderfully vivid account of the SANDNATS field trip to Hilbre Island (an inch of rainfall was recorded on the day). When Pete and Dot Shirley took over as Bulletin Editors in 1990, they decided that a regular input from Bob was going to be part of

the scheme of things and the 'Weather Report for the Year' became a feature of every annual report. Everyone was pleased when he could make it to a meeting- his cheerful manner would light up any occasion. Unfortunately during 2005, terminal illness suddenly intruded into a life that had hitherto been remarkable for physical fitness and good health and he was taken from us. The Club extends its sympathy to Cath and the family at this time of loss.

We are very grateful to Bob's daughters for sharing their reflections on his life.

'On the 13th of November 2005, Robert Edward Mansell (affectionately known as 'Bob') passed away peacefully in his sleep.

Dad was a well loved and respected member of the community, and could always be seen riding his bike throughout the borough and further afield, using his 'other' loved mode of transport, the train, to get out of the hustle and bustle of the city.

He loved to cycle down the Sandwell Valley- chatting to everyone he met. He always came home full of tales of the people he had met that day and all the things he had spotted on his journey- from wild flowers, trees and birds, to the amount of traffic on the roads. His trip down the Valley was never complete without a visit to the tea room for his favourite tipple- a hot cup of tea- with a 'well done' tea cake. Dad recorded the weather of the day and much else he had seen in his diary every evening. He was very friendly and was always inviting people round to the house for a cup of tea and a slice of mum's home- made cake. In return he asked them to sign the visitor's book.

His love for cycling and appreciation of the need for protection of our environment has made an impact on all our lives and those of everyone who ever came into close contact with him. He had an insatiable appetite for learning; finding out odd and seemingly useless information (particularly to us- growing up as teenagers under his wing) and sharing it with us! However, despite our complaints then, we are now all very grateful and proud of the legacy he has left us and almost instinctively we are all carrying out his wishes. Julie and Jane are actively promoting conservation at the school where they work by encouraging bird watching and planning to take part in the Schools RSPB Bird Watching Project.

We have encouraged the Head Teacher to take part in the pilot scheme for schools in Sandwell to recycle paper. We have planted hundreds of

daffodil bulbs with the children as well as encouraging them to use their small nature trail (including the 'mini-beast log pile' - very exciting for the nursery and reception years). Dad would be so pleased with us.

At the moment Juanita (the eldest of his three daughters) with the help of mum, is training for a charity cycle ride to Peru later this year. This will be both in memory of dad and also to support the work of the Macmillan nurses who, along with mum, cared for him during the last months of life. Further information about that challenge can be found on 'www.justgiving.com/juanita'.

Dad is sadly missed by us all.

Juanita, Julie and Jane.



Firsts for the Year (2004)

We have not had 'firsts' for a little while. I omitted Janet Granger's list last year. Here it is. Use the kitchen calendar to jot down your firsts for 2006. Plants mentioned are in flower- from various Sandwell Locations.

First snowdrop	21/01/04	Charlemont
Lawn cut	23/02/04	Oak House area
Skylark	03/03/04	WB Crematorium
Queen wasp	13/03/04	Oak House
Tortoiseshell butterfly	17/03/04	Charlemont
Primrose	04/03/04	Stone Cross
Bumble bee queen	17/03/04	Oak House area
Frog spawn	21/03/04	Marsh Lane Pool
Cowslip	21/03/04	Stone Cross
Silver birch catkin	22/03/04	Oak House area
Brimstone butterfly	12/04/04	Ray hall Sewage beds
Peacock butterfly	12/04/04	Ray hall Sewage beds
Small white butterfly	12/04/04	Ray hall Sewage beds
Swallow	12/04/04	Riding school (Charlemont)
Swift	27/04/04	Oak House area
Horse chestnut	30/04/04	Old Church Graveyard
2 spot ladybird	24/04/04	Jubilee Street

Extended Meeting Reports for Outdoor Events in 2005

Conservation Work in the Valley : April 9th . (Leader Matt Darby)

After a week of uncertain weather and forecasted thunderstorms which did not materialise, we were anxiously hoping for a good afternoon for our walk with Matt Darby, Head Ranger at Sandwell Valley, who promised us a glimpse of parts of the Valley not often seen by the majority of visitors to Sandwell. He had also arranged a short boat trip to Cygnet Island if time and weather permitted.

A dozen Sandnats' members were greeted by Matt at Park Farm car park and briefed on the work carried out by rangers in Sandwell Valley. It includes patrolling the area, litter picking and organising and assisting at the many functions which take place. They also manage to fit in conservation work, which is probably the most rewarding part of the job. Matt explained that some of the larger projects are put out to contractors when this is more cost-effective.

Our first stop was John's Wood and Pool, an area of woodland with a small pool to the rear of the miniature golf course. Around the bank of the pool we spotted a solitary marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* in bud and several patches of flowering common dog-violet *Viola riviniana*. Several patches of sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum* were showing through the leaf-litter but were not yet in flower.

From here we walked along the track, passing several fields which used to be part of Farmer Brown's land. On the way we observed a buzzard being mobbed by crows attempting to rid their territory of the predator. Matt explained farming and management techniques used to encourage birds such as lapwing, golden plover and partridge. He pointed out a field containing millet and kale, which had been sown to encourage woodcocks into the area. Unfortunately none were seen on this visit. A little further on he left the party and ventured into a poorly drained area containing patches of soft rush *Juncus effusus* and great willow-herb *Epilobium hirsutum*. The purpose of his departure was realised when we were treated to the sight of two snipe hurriedly vacating the area. He informed us that they were often found here, and the party agreed that local knowledge was indispensable. As time was now a factor we

hurried - (not typical Sandnats' behaviour!) - to Swan Pool, where a ranger was waiting to ferry us across to Cygnet Island to view an area of scrub cleared by Matt and his team. As we queued to board the dinghy another of the rangers' important duties was urgently required, and our crossing had to wait. A runaway horse had thrown its rider to the ground and bounded off in the direction of Swan Pool car park. The distraught rider had to be quickly transported to the other side of the pool in the dinghy, to intercept the frightened horse before it reached the road beyond. Eventually we reached the island and spent a few minutes inspecting the site. All this activity did not disturb a Canada goose from sitting tightly on her nest.

We were all safely returned to the mainland, (a distance of about five metres!), and made our way back to Park Farm via Motorway Mound where we spent time examining the new growth on the medlar *Mespilus germanica*, a Sandwell Valley speciality.

Matt was thanked for giving us his time and expertise, and a similar walk was provisionally arranged for next year.



Expedition over shark- infested channel to Cygnet Island !

Lynn and Mike Poulton

Visit to Thor's Cave and surrounding area - May 7th 2005

All who came on this trip had something to remember. My abiding memory on a wonderful day was of John Shrimpton, Club President who, in spite of his advancing years showed all of us why he had been for so long leader of the West Bromwich Ramblers' Club. Steadfast in climbing, he also demonstrated how to walk on a variety of surfaces without slipping. His knowledge of the British countryside is probably unrivalled in SANDNATS and he regaled us with much about his experiences in the Peaks. The find of the day was undoubtedly that of a new plant gall- or rather the manifestation of a new stage in its life history for the first time in the British Isles. Credit for this goes to Mike Poulton. I leave him to give a full account of the expedition.

Ed.

Twelve Sandnats members and three dogs assembled in the car park in the small village of Wetton on a cool and windy spring day to explore the beautiful countryside around Thor's Cave in Staffordshire. Exposed, wind-swept dales give way to sheltered river valleys and in early May the roadside banks and meadows are abundant with spring flowers. The delights on display included, goldilocks buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus* which is seldom seen with all petals intact, water avens *Geum rivale* with its attractive, nodding, creamy-pink to pinkish-purple flowers on erect stems, delicate patches of wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, aniseed-smelling sweet cicely *Myrrhis odorata*, a long naturalised white-flowered umbellifer in these parts, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, cowslip *Primula veris*, red campion *Silene dioica*, meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*, common dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, early dog-violet *Viola reichenbachiana*, bugle *Ajuga reptans* and greater stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*.

As we approached the ascent to Thor's Cave the wooded hillside was abundant with wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, wild strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, wood forget-me-not *Myosotis sylvatica* and Ramsons *Allium ursinum*. Half way up the steep-stepped terrace, patches of the curious moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* were discovered. Its other common name -'town-hall clock'- derives from the cubical head of flowers, having one four-lobed flower on each side and one five-lobed terminal flower.

As we approached the cave entrance heavy rain and swirling wind prompted members to take drastic action. Much hilarity followed when

scrambling into the cave to find shelter was hastily abandoned on discovering that the wind and rain blowing through the open side of the cave was worse than actually being out in the open! Comments about Thor being a madman to want to live here (or words to that effect) were echoed.

The rain subsided and our climb to the top of the hill continued. As we approached the summit our spirits were lifted by the sight of several patches of early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, and the sun made a brief appearance which pleased us even more. Lunch was taken in the shelter of a small hillock above Thor's Cave. Amongst the exposed limestone outcrops nearby we inspected several patches of the uncommon spring cinquefoil *Potentilla neumanniana*. Before leaving we enjoyed the glorious views of the river valley and surrounding countryside. The river disappears underground in this area for much of the year.

The steady walk across open fields back to our starting point was negotiated without incident, and after a break we decided to take a short car ride down to Wetton Mill. This mile and a half journey, normally taking about ten minutes, came to an abrupt halt half way down the narrow descending road where a gang of contractors were cutting up a fallen tree which had blocked the road. They then proceeded to put all of the cuttings through a chipping machine. It was obvious we were unlikely to proceed for a half hour or so and being naturalists, the opportunity to examine roadside vegetation was seized upon. We were quickly rewarded for our efforts when several specimens of the rare shrub, mountain currant *Ribes alpinum*, were discovered growing along the roadside, its native British stronghold being centred around this area. In addition to this we found a few of the leaves were infected with a rust gall* (see later in report). We eventually arrived at Wetton Mill and discovered more mountain currant bushes in the area. Large patches of white butterbur *Petasites albus* were evident all along the riverside meadow in this area and were already well into seed. The lush growth prompted a search for invertebrates in the riverside vegetation by Mike and Malcolm and their finds included the Nationally Notable hoverfly *Cheilosia pubera*. This beautiful bronze- black fly is a speciality of the Staffs Peak District. In general, however, conditions for study of insects were pretty unfavourable. Along the waters- edge patches of opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* were in full flower and growing on the exposed rock-face near the cafeteria were hairy rock-cress *Arabis hirsuta*, rue-leaved saxifrage *Saxifraga*

tridactylites, maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes* agg. and field madder *Sherardia arvensis*. On a nearby wall several plants of cornsalad *Valerianella* sp. were displaying clusters of tiny pale-lilac flowers.

Our thoughts turned to refreshments, which we enjoyed in the nearby cafeteria. By this time we were well into the afternoon and it was decided to end the excursion. Parting gestures were exchanged and members dispersed into the surrounding countryside.

Specimens of the rust gall on leaves of *Ribes alpinum* were collected by Mike Bloxham and sent off for a determination to rust gall experts Tom Preece and Nigel Stringer. They believed the specimens were a first for Britain on this host species. The specimens were sent to Brian Spooner at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew for his expert opinion and the following reply was later received:

‘Dear Dr Stringer,

Thank you for your letter of 9 June with interesting rust gall on Ribes alpinum for comment and deposit at Kew. The rust is certainly a typical aecidium and must therefore belong to one of the complex of taxa previously referred to Aecidium grossulariae or Puccinia ribesii-caricis. This is a complex of taxa and as you suggest is one of the Puccinia caricina group the aecidial stage of which may indeed not previously been recorded in Britain. Identifying which of this complex is involved here is difficult, but you may well be correct in suggesting P caricina var magnusii as I assume the alternate hosts Carex acutiformis and C riparia, are locally frequent. Other possibilities might be var. pringsheimiana, alternating with C nigra and C acuta, var. ribesii-pendulae (C pendula), var. caricina (C pseudocyperus) or var. ribis-nigra-paniculatae (C paniculata) which are all said to form aecidia on Ribes alpina in Europe, forming sori which, as far as I know, are indistinguishable one from another.

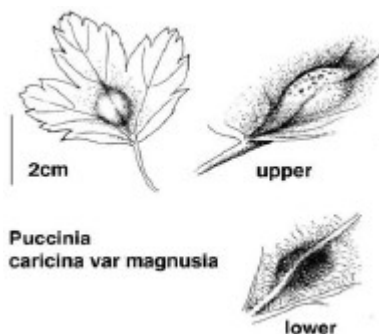
I am always very pleased to receive material for deposit at Kew, especially of those species which are less often collected, although many common fungi are also not fully represented in the herbarium. I have accessed this collection as P caricina ? var. magnusii, with accession number K(M)131128.

I have not separately contacted Mike Bloxham or Tom Preece.

Yours sincerely,
Brian Spooner’

We did not see any of the alternative host species *Carex* on our visit. It might well be worth another visit at some time to establish which of the above mentioned sedges are found in the area.

Mike Poulton



Sutton Park (Westwood Coppice & Longmoor Pool area). June 1st 2003: leader Dr Stefan Bodnar.

There was a good turnout for this evening visit with Stefan as our guide. The weather was a little changeable, but we soon made ornithological inroads towards a final list of 27 different species. Blackish rabbits put in an appearance and the first small bats were seen as we skirted Westwood coppice. Mike Poulton's time arrived as Stefan led us into the marshy areas above the pool. Common butterwort and cotton grass were amongst the plants soon noted in this exceptionally good piece of regionally important wetland. We were forced to leave it, deteriorating light bringing a risk of treading on sensitive species.

Perhaps it was the local knowledge of our leader which enabled us to not only go to the right places in the limited period available, but also to arrive at the right times! We must credit him with placing us in exactly the correct setting to see a most exceptional bird as it flitted like a mini stealth bomber across Longmoor Pool as dusk set in. It must have heard the cry of 'nightjar!' Mike West and fellow birders set up- maybe it was permanently startled, because there have been no further sightings since. Fittingly this was the last record for the evening and the Club was grateful to Stefan for acting as pilot on this memorable occasion. The evening was in many ways an informal one as we enjoyed a flagship West Midlands wildlife site, but we nonetheless managed to accumulate the following records:

Birds & Mammals (as listed by Andy Mabbett)

Seen

jay, crow, magpie, woodpigeon, meadow pipit, blue tit, linnet, yellow-hammer, whitethroat, stonechat kestrel, blackbird, willow warbler, mallard, grey heron, mute Swan (p, nesting). Tufted duck, coot, moorhen, great crested grebe (w. young) . **Nightjar (seen after the Poultons departed!).**

Heard:

green woodpecker, song thrush, robin, skylark, chiffchaff, tawny owl (heard by Grainne Greene).

Mammals:

Rabbit (including some black ones), Pipistrelle Bat (Soprano?).

Some plant species mentioned in conversation as well as being noted on site (by Mike Poulton).

Festuca tenuifolia - fine-leaved sheep's fescue

Nardus stricta - mat-grass

Deschampsia flexuosa - wavy hair-grass

Poa humilis - spreading meadow-grass

Luzula multiflora ssp. congesta - heath wood-rush

Juncus squarrosus - heath rush

Eriophorum angustifolium - common cotton-grass

Carex echinata - star sedge

Carex viridula ssp. ssp. oedocarpa

Dryopteris carthusiana - narrow buckler-fern

Plantago coronopus - buck's-horn plantain

Galium saxatile - heath bedstraw

Pinguicula vulgaris - common butterwort

Ranunculus hederaceus - ivy-leaved crowfoot

Rumex acetosella - sheep's sorrel

Trifolium dubium - lesser trefoil

Sorbus aucuparia - rowan

Quercus robur - pedunculate oak

Pinus nigra - Corsican pine

Castanea sativa - sweet chestnut

Valeriana dioica - marsh valerian

Potentilla erecta -tormentil

Potentilla palustris - marsh cinquefoil

Ulex europaeus – gorse

Ed.



Looking Northwards from Longmoor Pool area.



Gorse Farm Wood. July 6th 2005 (leader Joe Miskin).

Gorse Farm Wood in the middle of suburban Great Barr provides a variety of habitats. Around 300 different plants and animals have already been recorded for this site that has been the focus of a considerable amount of conservation effort over the preceding two years. Our leader was able to take us round to review these activities on a very pleasant evening, contrasting with the terminal downpour entirely preventing the club's previous foray here. Joe and his team have combated invasive scrub in wet areas, rebuilding the damaged barrier at the lower end of the large pool and restored fencing and pathways as necessary. He has also had the Eastern approaches to the reserve tidied up to increase respect for the area and has encouraged both the local primary school and the entire community surrounding this admirable little piece of wildspace to get involved in these activities. A programme of 'open days' involving events at the school and also on site have played a key part in this. We walked the entire reserve, stopping at strategic points such as the upper raised meadow to review activity, hear of experiences during the work and discuss future possibilities. It was on this upper part that Pete Shirley made a significant re-discovery of the oak gall *Andricus callidoma*. This spindle-shaped structure is very rarely seen amongst buds on oak and there are few regional records for it. The evidence that it has probably been present at Gorse Farm Wood over a number of years is useful- much remains to be discovered about our less common gall forming wasps. We are indebted to Jane Hardwick and Pete Shirley for the lists that follow. Additional commentary on the visit is found in Mike Poulton's Botany report.

Plants (and moth!) listed by Jane Hardwick

Wild carrot *Daucus carota* (Meadow area)
Salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* (meadow area)
Smooth Hawksbeard *Crepis capillaris* (meadow area)
Field bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis* (meadow area)
Common ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* (with its own yellow and black striped cinnabar moth caterpillar)
Hedge bindweed *Calystegia sepium* (Meadow area)
Hedge woundwort *Stachys sylvaticum* (meadow area)
Figwort *Scrophularia nodosa* in the hedges and edges of the wood.
Enchanters nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* in the woodland
Wood horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum* in the woodland
Ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* (near the pond)
Celery leaved buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus* (near the pond)
Angelica *Angelica sylvestris* (near the pond)
Pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* (near the pond)
Toadrush *Juncus bufonius*. (near the pond).



ANDRICUS
CALLIDOMA

Plant Galls listed by Pete Shirley

HOST	GALL-CAUSER
<i>Betula</i>	<i>Massalongia betulifolia</i> (Harris) (midge)
<i>Galium</i>	<i>Cecidophyes galii</i> (Karpeles) (= <i>Eriophyes</i>) (mite)
<i>Quercus</i>	<i>Andricus kollari</i> (Hartig) __ marble gall
	<i>Andricus callidoma</i> (Hartig) (= <i>cirratus</i>)
	<i>Cynips divisa</i> Hartig __ pea gall
	<i>Neuroterus quercusbaccarum</i> (L.) (= <i>lenticularis</i>)
	common spangle gall
	(All of the above are gall wasps.)
	<i>Macrodiplosis dryobia</i> (F. Löw) (midge)
	<i>Trioza remota</i> Förster (psyllid)
<i>Rosa</i>	<i>Blennocampa phyllocolpa</i> (Vit & Vikb) (= <i>pusilla</i>) (sawfly)
<i>Salix</i>	<i>Pontania bridgmanii</i> (Cameron) (sawfly)
Ed	

Some Records from Dolydd Hafren :September 10th 2005.

Sandnats expeditions to more distant places do not usually attract very large parties. This may well be though fears about the weather, but history reveals that these occasions have not habitually been attended by adverse conditions. This day, however, aroused foreboding from the outset because dawn saw steady rain falling from the greyest of skies. There was also some mist and as I journeyed with Malcolm Smart, we were anticipating the worst of days for insect observations. It would have been much more congenial to have remained at home to watch whatever play was possible in the gripping Test Match between England and



**PANTILIUS
TUNICATUS**

Australia. As we approached the sites some relief was experienced as the rain ceased and some brightening of conditions was suspected. The party arrived on time, to be met by Brayton Holt who suggested a schedule of activities for the day. After a brief walk around the first smaller reserve, buff tip moth larvae were observed on the move. Malcolm handed to me what looked like a rare plant gall (later determined as the work of non-galling aphids) and we then re-embarked for the more distant reserve where we were to spend most time.

Brayton conducted us around the reserve - we visited the hides and given the persistent dull conditions and his excellent commentaries on the feathered wildlife, I became a temporary birder.

As we approached the hide near the river, a brief period of better weather saw Malcolm and I depart to explore the open spaces and hedge systems more closely. He tried some sweep netting while I conducted a search of all the Alders to see which galls were present. I seemed to be drawing a blank, not finding any of the familiar ones when eventually I came across the spectacular fungus gall *Taphrina alni* in numbers on a larger tree. The tongue-like outgrowths from the 'cones' vary from livid yellow to purple in this exotic and uncommon gall.

Malcolm handed me a few insects as he strove to provide some invertebrate data for site managers who had kindly given us permission to

collect. The credit for a potentially excellent find (*Syntormon macula* – a small metallic green fly) goes to him as he strove to make the best of what had, at one stage, looked to be a hopeless day for any entomologists. One bug seemed to be present in some numbers. Living on a variety of trees & shrubs *Pantilius tunicatus* is green with red tinges and about 1 cm in length. A single specimen of the champion bug *Dicyphus globulifer* was also collected.

The report concludes with a list of flies collected on the day. With two exceptions (MGB), the records below were provided by Malcolm . Some specimens are being submitted for further examination, so readers will realise that this list is provisional.



List of Diptera (true flies)

<i>Phylidorea ferruginea</i> (MGB)	Common yellowish crane fly (damp places)
<i>Erioptera (Ilisia) maculata</i> (MGB)	Common spotted- winged crane fly
<i>Dolichopus latelimbatus</i>	Found on foliage (waterside & general)
<i>Dolichopus plumipes</i>	On waterside foliage
<i>Syntormon denticulatus</i>	Found on foliage
<i>Syntormon macula</i> (RDB3)	Found on foliage- very few U.K. records.
<i>Argyra leucocephala</i>	Found on foliage
<i>Campsicnemus pumilio</i>	On waterside foliage
<i>Sympycnus desoutteri</i>	On waterside foliage
<i>Lonchoptera lutea</i>	On waterside foliage
<i>Melanostoma mellinum</i>	At flowers
<i>Platycheirus albimanus</i>	At flowers
<i>Platycheirus granditarsus</i>	On waterside flowers
<i>Eupeodes corollae</i>	On waterside flowers
<i>Syrirta pipiens</i>	On waterside flowers
<i>Sepsis orthocnemis</i>	Found on foliage -larvae develop in dung.
<i>Notiphila cinerea</i>	On waterside foliage
<i>Parydra aquila</i>	On waterside foliage
<i>Parydra coarctata</i>	On waterside foliage
Ed.	

Entomology Report

I have been involved elsewhere throughout 2005, so there is no report (no records were received) so in recognition of the passage of time I am contributing a poem followed by a copy of part of Pete Shirley's first entomology report. In the first days the club decided that sections were a useful concept (the ornithology section was very strong at that time). The entomology section was much less reputable and its offerings much shorter than those of the birders !! I cannot quite get all of the report in- a scorpion fly has vanished below the horizon. Nonetheless it was the first contribution to the extensive lists of today and the insects mentioned have to be viewed with affection in that context..

The Birth of SANDNATS (1975)

The hut is wooden and the evening unexceptional.
Together summoned, a varied crew to man a
New ship scarce designed and on a course
Uncertain- their new found leader of a cheerful and
Generous disposition. New commissioned-newly
Crowned, he smiled upon the courtiers who shuffled in
To offer verbal fuel- nurture green flames new kindled
by opponents of a dark unpleasant land tortured to eye,
to ear and to the nostrils foul, unnatural.

So thirty years have passed- as has the place
Of that first time- the hut long trashed. The early crew now moves
With less alacrity, the captain gone. The hearth of that first fire
Still warm, now sheds a gentle glow which cautiously pervades
A place less clamorous, with less raw industrial offence.
Diminished now the flames of iron, the bite of toxic vapour:
Again some echo of ancestral times with greener days, but
Sullied by hum of modern artifice- enmeshed and anguished
By new skein of all embracing tarmac tentacles.



July 1975.

This is the first of what is hoped to be a regular series of reports about the insect life of the Valley. When reading these it must be borne in mind that the members of the class Insecta are extremely complicated, and whereas British mammals are counted in dozens and British birds in hundreds British insects are counted in thousands. This means that the entomologist never finishes his work and if this club is in existence in fifty years time new species of insects will still be being discovered in the Valley.

The diversity of insects does make them the most rewarding of all groups of animals to study, whether one is captivated by their beauty fascinated by their complicated life-histories or curious as to their place in the many food chains of which they are part. All that is required is an enquiring mind, patience and the willingness to be considered slightly eccentric!

The most obvious insects encountered on a casual walk in the Valley in July will be members of the orders Diptera (true flies), Hymenoptera (ants, bees and wasps), Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) and Coleoptera (beetles). A few minutes quietly observing any group of flowers will reveal representatives of each visiting them. A closer inspection of the leaves and stems will reveal the presence of members of the order Hemiptera (true bugs). Cuckoo-spit forms the protection for various bug larvae. There are plenty of the brightly coloured Damsel-Flies of the order Odonata in evidence, and mosquitoes and midges which belong to the Diptera will be as interested in you as you may be in them. Several species of their attractive cousins the hover flies, or Syrphidae will also be seen.

Two of the most interesting species so far discovered are the red forms of the Damsel-Fly *Ischnura elegans* and the largest of all British flies *Tipula maxima*, with a wing-span of two and a half inches.

During the next few weeks you should see three members of the Vanessaid tribe of butterflies, the Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral and around the pools the bright red Dragonfly *Synetura flavescens* as well as one of our largest Dragonflies *Aeshna grandis*.

The following is our first list. Once a species has appeared on it it will not normally be repeated. If you wish to keep a record, therefore, retain each list as it appears. More general information about insects will follow in the winter months when fieldwork is reduced.

ORDER	SPECIES
Odonata (Dragonflies/Damsel-flies).....	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>
	<i>Ischnura elegans</i> var. <i>f. rufescens</i> .
Orthoptera (Grasshoppers /Crickets).....	<i>Forficula laevis</i> .
Dermaptera (Earwigs).....	<i>Colocoris norvegicus</i> (Gmelin)
Hemiptera (True Bugs).....	<i>Pentatoma caspica</i>
Neuroptera (Lacewings).....	<i>Aglais urticae</i> (Small Tortoiseshell)
Lepidoptera (Butterflies & Moths).....	<i>Pieris brassicae</i> (Cabbage White)
	<i>Pieris rapae</i> (Small White)
	<i>Maniola jurtina</i> (Meadow Brown)
Diptera (True Flies).....	<i>Tipula maxima</i> (Crane Fly)
	<i>Helophilus pendulus</i> L.
	<i>Lucilia caesar</i> (Greenbottle)
	<i>Sarcophaga carnaria</i> (Flesh Fly)
	<i>Scatophaga stercorarium</i> (Dung Fly)
	<i>Velutella pellucens</i>
	<i>Rhagio scolopacea</i> (Snipe Fly)
Siphonoptera (Fleas).....	<i>Acanthosyops nigra</i> (Black Ant)
Hymenoptera (Ants, Bees, Wasps).....	<i>Adalia 2-punctata</i> (2 spot Ladybird)
Coleoptera (Beetles).....	<i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i> (7 spot ")
	<i>Propylea 14-punctata</i> (Ladybird)
	<i>Amblystomus bipustulatus</i> (Water Beetle)
	<i>Cantharis rustica</i> Fm. (Soldier Beetle)
	<i>Cantharis pellida</i> Gs. { " }
	<i>Cantharis livida</i> { " }

MATT'S RANGERS' REPORT



Well it's been another interesting and fulfilling year down at the valley, with lots of highs and at least one low. Getting the bad news out of the way first- the Sandwell Valley Trails Group's unsuccessful bid for ITV's Big 50 grant. Working in partnership with Sandwell Valley's Countryside Staff, we tried in vain to bring in the sum of £50,000 for major improvements to the Forge Mill LNR site, having filled in what seemed like endless amounts of paper work, we managed to get to the public voting stage on Central News, and were only narrowly beaten by a bid from Droitwich.

Work has taken place on North Island- we have again cut back the invasive growth of Bramble and Willow (even removing the stumps and their roots in places), and a channel has also been dug between the lake and the small pool enclosed by the two spits. The main reason for this was to improve the flow between the main pool and the interior one, thus hopefully preventing it from becoming stagnant during the summer months. Also around Forge Mill, Matt Hadlington has been improving the circular walk at the base of the bank, by pruning back any overgrown blackthorn, this has also helped the retrieval of litter in this area. Further tasks have taken place on the western bank, by thinning the Italian Alder there, which we hope will stop predation of any nesting birds on the island and should improve the ground flora. We have used the brash to produce a dead hedge, which should prevent easy access to the waters edge from the visiting hoards. This, I am pleased to say, has been given approval by our local Water Rail population which now seem to frequent that area on a regular basis.

Conservation work has started on Golf Course Woods, with countryside ranger Adam Butcher having a lead role in that area. Rangers have completed the cutting of one half of the woodland ride and Adam hopes that this will encourage the spread of the heather there. The hazel coppice there has been split into two compartments and we have cut the lower one this winter, my only concern is the large number of rabbits that appear to be in this area, as they are quite partial to a new growth salad. Adam has also decided to try in his hand a fixed-point photography, with a

number of points already marked to review the progress.

With the help of Jo Miskin and The Forestry Commission we have managed to secure £20,000 worth of funding for pathway improvements in Park Farm Woods, Priory Woods and part of Forge Mill LNR. Work will be starting on the 9th January 06. We will be undertaking the work ourselves to keep costs down, this work should encourage the public to stick to the paths and cut down on the unnecessary trampling. Further footpath improvement works are planned for various other parts of the valley.



At the time of writing, progress on the new footpath through Park Farm Woods is very nearly complete; the footpath improvements have gone really well, with some time being spent on the wetter areas. New dams have been installed and have worked well holding water back. An order has already been placed for a number of native water loving plants; all of the slippery old railway sleeper bridges have been replaced, with more user-friendly surfaces. A lot of time was spent in avoiding the surface roots, which came above ground in numerous areas. Board edging has also been used with pegs at regular intervals; these will contain the new surface for a number of years. The soil also held some interest changing from light sand near the motorway to heavy clay nearer the Park Farm end.

The Countryside Stewardship has also been high on the agenda this year, with more hedge planting and fencing taking place in the area that we call The New Camp Field, passers by will also notice that the hedge at the bottom of this field has been laid.

Guided walks have also gone well with the Bat Evening being very popular with over 50 children and adults attending. We started off with a

fine barbecue, cooked expertly by the girls in the tearooms. Burgers and Hot Dogs all went down very well. After a short talk we set off on a guided walk led by bat expert Chris Sherlock, it wasn't until we reached Dartmouth Park Boating Pool that we all had the most spectacular sight of large numbers of Serotine bats catching insects over the pool. The Fungus Foray walk also proved very popular again, with a second one having to be organised to meet the demand, again large numbers were identified.

Another busy work programme awaits us for 2006, with several events and guided walks planned. The Ranger service will again be hosting a guided walk specifically for the Sandnats to view current and future management projects. We look forward to seeing you on Saturday, 8th April 2006 at 1.00pm on Park Farm car park.



Matt Darby.

It is good to see the commencement of a photographic recording scheme for the Valley. Members will be encouraged by the new path systems but be prepared for an initial shock because the work has required a good few fringe alterations. In the bird report that follows, FML= Forge Mill Lake & FMF-Forge Mill Farm. The club remains indebted to Paul for his extending period of service as ornithology reporter for the Club. It is very encouraging to see old favourites such as lesser spotted woodpecker back again— and possibly breeding. The owl news is mixed- I have not heard a tawny owl outside my house (Europa Field & copse) for at least three years and the demise of the barn owl was most unfortunate. Given the propensity of the Valley for peculiar imports, we may expect it to host a large colony of ring-necked parakeets before long !

Ed.

Sandwell Valley Bird Report for 2005

January

The winter of 2004/5 will be remembered by many people for the influx of waxwings across the country. Fortunately Sandwell Valley and the West Bromwich area in general did not miss out. 50+ were seen flying over FMF towards the crematorium on the 21st. and presumably the same flock were later seen flying over Newton Road. A similar sized flock was at Sandwell Hospital on the 23rd. and 150 were seen off Hallam Street opposite the hospital on the 30th . Ending a good month for waxwings, a flock of 60 were by West Bromwich Police Station on the 31st.

Other sightings included single peregrine at Ray Hall on the 1st and another at FMF on the 23rd. Both marsh and willow tit visited the RSPB reserve during the month, with 3 willow tit seen there on the 9th . On the 19th, a total 51 lapwings were counted at FML. A snipe count at the RSPB reserve on the 22nd revealed 44 common snipe and 5 jack snipe. A second winter little gull also put in an appearance at FMF on the same day. Approximately 70 pink footed geese flew NW over FML on the 25th . Goosander numbers peaked at 60 at FML on the 29th.

February

More waxwings were in evidence on the 1st with a flock of 100+ seen flying over FML car park in the direction of Park Farm. February is generally regarded as a good month to see lesser spotted woodpecker, and one was seen in Priory Woods on the 4th with one coming to the RSPB feeder on the 20th .

10 common snipe were seen off Salters Lane on the 9th with the same number, plus a single woodcock seen there on the 20th . 87 lapwings were at FMF on the 22nd , with 44 goosander also present.

March

Waxwings were still about into March, with a flock of 100 or so by the BP filling station at Cronehills Island in West Bromwich on the 15th. 23 were also seen near Salters Lane on the 19th but this proved to be the final sighting of the winter.

150+ fieldfare and 50+ redwing were at FMF on the 7th ,and 2 buzzards were near Swan Pool on the same day. The first chiffchaff was heard calling at FML car park on the 13th heralding the start of the arrival of summer migrants. 2 sand martins were seen at FML on the 19th. when a little ringed plover was also noted, and a wheatear was seen at Swan Pool. The 19th saw a ring- necked parakeet visit the RSPB feeding station. On the 22nd , skylarks were singing over Hill House Farm and from Swan

Pool meadow, and the first willow warbler was heard by Swan Pool on the 24th. The arrivals continued with 12 sand martins at Swan Pool on the 28th and a swallow there on the 30th .

APRIL

A pair of lesser spotted woodpeckers were seen regularly in Priory Woods during April and are thought to have bred there. The Ice House heronry was again a focus of much activity during the Spring and is now into its 11th year, the first nests having appeared in 1995.

A ring necked parakeet visited the RSPB feeding station on the 6th and again on the 25th. 4 buzzards were seen circling over Hill House Farm on the 7th. The day also saw 2 little ringed plovers and a common sandpiper at FML and 2 pairs of gadwall in the RSPB marsh. The 11th saw a male redstart in the paddocks and an oystercatcher at Swan Pool.

An unusual sighting on the 16th was that of a white stork flying over the Valley, although it is thought likely that this was an escaped bird.

A pair of willow tits and a pair of marsh tits were seen near FML on the 18th suggesting possible breeding of both of these similar species.

By the end of the month other summer migrants seen in the Valley included house martin, yellow wagtail, garden warbler, blackcap, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat, sedge warbler, reed warbler, grasshopper warbler and swift.

MAY

The ring-necked parakeet continued to visit the RSPB reserve and was seen frequently throughout the month. On a number of occasions, a pair were present, fuelling speculation about possible breeding in the locality. An oystercatcher was at FML on the 1st, whilst on the 4th, some 40 black tailed godwits were seen flying over the lake at 9-50a.m.

A male redstart delighted visitors to the RSPB on the 6th by lingering around the feeding station area for a few hours, allowing excellent views. On the following day a wood warbler was by Forge Mill Farm trail and a whinchat was in the RSPB marsh.

Owl sightings for the month included a long eared owl at Swan Pool car park, seen by a fisherman at 3-30a.m. on the 8th, and a short eared owl, noted on the 10th, 11th, and 12th from the 35 acre field at FMF and surrounding area.

On the 9th, large numbers of swift(c100), house martin(c250) and swallow(c100) were overFML. Also around the lake, 3 yellow wagtails and 4 garden warblers were noted.

A pair of ruddy ducks were at FML on the 11th, where 5 little ringed

plover, 3 dunlin and a juvenile snipe were all seen over the following few days. On the 21st a willow tit was feeding young near the RSPB reserve, whilst single oystercatcher and snipe were in the the marsh.

A pair of redstarts were seen near FML on the 22nd when 2 ringed plover and 5 little ringed plover were also seen around the lake. A lapwing with young was at FML on the 26th, and a mediterranean gull was present there on the 28th and 29th.

JUNE

4 sanderlings were seen from the newly opened lake hide at FML on the 4th, when a common tern was also present. A distressing discovery was made during the following week when a recently deceased barn owl was retrieved from the chimney breast of Rosewarne Cottage at Sandwell Park Farm, after apparently becoming trapped. A flock of 14 linnets was at Hill Top on the 11th, and a hobby was seen near FML on the following day.

On the 16th, after regular sightings of 1 or 2 birds, 4 ring-necked parakeets were at the RSPB feeding station which, it is thought, may have been a family group indicating breeding nearby.



**BARN OWL AT THE
COTTAGE**

On the same day, a cuckoo was heard near Swan Pool. 2 green sandpipers were seen in the RSPB marsh on the 18th and 2 oystercatchers flew over FML on the same day. Also on the 16th, a cuckoo was heard near FML.

On the 28th, 8 little ringed plovers were counted in the RSPB marsh when 2 snipe were also present. On the following day a gadwall with 2 young was on FML and the 30th saw a redshank at the same location.

JULY

At least 5 common sandpipers were at FML on the 4th, and a green sandpiper was in the RSPB marsh on the 6th. A black tailed godwit was at FML on the 7th, when dunlin and common sandpiper were also seen

at Swan Pool. An unusual sighting on the 9th was that of a flock of 50-60 crossbills which flew over the RSPB centre in the direction of FMF at 11-20 a.m.,. On the 10th a gadwall with 11 young was on FML, where 8 little ringed plovers were also present. A little egret was at FML on the 13th, when an adult, summer plumaged mediterranean gull was also in evidence on the RSPB island. It stayed around and was to be seen throughout the summer and into September.

2 female ruddy ducks were at FML on the 16th. On the 18th, 4 ring-necked parakeets were seen at the RSPB feeding station again. A green sandpiper was at the same location on the following day. On the 31st, an arctic tern was seen at FML and 2 common terns were also noted flying in an easterly direction over the lake.

AUGUST

On the 2nd, the gadwall family at FML, now consisting of 9 young appeared to have adopted a young tufted duck. This juvenile continued to be seen with the family group throughout the month.

On the 6th a ringed plover was at FML. A willow tit was seen near FML on the 7th and again on the RSPB feeder on the 10th. Also on the 10th, 2 juvenile ring necked parakeets were at the RSPB feeder. The following day, 2 adult and 3 juvenile bullfinches were seen feeding on elderberries near the RSPB centre. A juvenile reed warbler was also noted on the reserve on the same day.

A rare sighting for the Valley on the 13th was that of a hawfinch, seen flying over the RSPB reserve in the direction of Hill Top at 5-15p.m. Also at Hill Top on the 20th were 5+ redstart, 6 spotted flycatcher, 6+ white-throat, 10+ blackcap, 10+ willow warbler and 20 chiffchaff.

Other sightings for the month included a juvenile whinchat near FML on the 21st, a little owl and a spotted flycatcher in the paddocks, and a juvenile wheatear near Swan Pool on the 30th, and 10 cormorants flying over FML on the 31st. Also seen throughout the month was the mediterranean gull at FML.

SEPTEMBER

The mediterranean gull continued to frequent FML and was seen regularly during September. A yellow wagtail and a redstart were seen near FML on the 1st and a hobby was reported from the same location on the 2nd. A hobby was also seen on the 10th chasing hirundines at Sandwell Park Farm. Single wheatear and whinchat were by Swan Pool on the 3rd. The following day a total of 14 gadwall were on FML, and on the 5th, 67 lapwing were present there. On the 11th, a redshank was at FML, 2 tawny

owls were at Hill Top on the 13th, whilst on the 14th, a turtle dove was seen in the paddocks by Swan Pool. and a ruddy duck was at FML.

A ring-necked parakeet was in Dartmouth Park on the 20th. A peregrine was seen near FML on the 21st and again on the 22nd. A lesser spotted woodpecker was near FML on the 23rd. On the 28th, a total of 16 snipe were counted at FML, together with a single water rail.

OCTOBER

An observer at Hill Top on the 2nd recorded 20 siskin, single redpoll and marsh tit, 2 little owl and 15+ goldcrest. On the 8th, 4 stonechat were noted near Swan Pool. 16 wigeon and 7 gadwall were on Ice House Pool and 20+ snipe were counted on the RSPB reserve. The ring-necked parakeets continued to visit the RSPB feeding station during the month but visits became less frequent.

On the 23rd, 2 yellowhammers were seen in the vicinity of Swan Pool. Sadly, this is a bird that now seems to be in decline both in the Valley and also nationally.

The first returning goosanders were at FML on the 25th with 6 females present. Redwings and fieldfares were in evidence by the 26th with 75+ and 100+ seen over FML, whilst the following day a brambling was seen over the RSPB reserve. In contrast, a late swift was noted on the 30th over Newton Meadow by the crematorium.



BULLFINCH

NOVEMBER

On the 6th, a total of 30 wigeon were on Ice House Pool, 9 gadwall and 2 shoveler were also present. 12 redpoll and 4 siskin were at FML on the 8th, when 2 goldeneye were on FML. A Mediterranean gull was at FML on the 9th, but this was the last sighting of the year.

A woodcock was seen in Priory Woods on the 19th. On the following day, 2 golden plovers were noted off Salters Lane. The 25th saw a peregrine fly over the reserve. Single jack snipe and water rail were in the RSPB marsh on the 29th, and to end a quiet month, a dunlin was there on the 30th.

DECEMBER

A dunlin was again in the RSPB marsh on the 1st. On the 2nd, after an absence of a couple of months, 2 ring-necked parakeets were again on the RSPB reserve. A single golden plover flew over the RSPB centre on the 3rd, and a single female ruddy duck was on FML on the same day.

Around FML trail on the 4th were counted 3 goldcrest, 30 siskin, 15 long

tailed tits and 2 willow tits. A snipe count at the RSPB on the same day revealed 25 common snipe and 2 jack snipe.

5+ water rail were in the RSPB marsh on the 10th. Goosander numbers for the month peaked at 43 on FML on the 11th. On the 14th a pair of goldeneye were on FML and 24 wigeon were counted on the River Tame. 2 brambling were by FML on the 16th. On the 19th, both marsh tit and willow tit were identified on the RSPB reserve. On the 21st, 3 ruddy duck were present at FML.

Paul Smith (Nature Conservation Officer: Sandwell).

Sandwell Valley Botany & Conservation Report 2005

February - March

John Shrimpton carried out his seasonal Snowdrop count. His results confirmed an increase of three plants in John's Wood bringing the total to nine clumps. In Priory Wood there are two patches which is a loss of one on the previous year. There is a steady decline in the area around the small pool above Cypress Pool with four plants. Seven small plants were noted near the ha-ha and one clump in Camp Lane. He concludes that double-flowered plants appear to be in decline and single-flowered plants appear to be on the increase.

April

One plant of marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* still clings on in John's Pool and nearby dog-violet *Viola riviniana* and sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum* appear to be increasing. Millet and Kale have both been sown in one of Farmer Brown's old fields, in the hope of encouraging woodcocks to feed in the area. On the island in Swan Pool the small patch of sphagnum moss (*Sphagnum* sp.) discovered the previous year and a rarity in Sandwell Valley appears to be surviving despite its exposure after the removal of surrounding scrub.

May

The spread of Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* in Sot's Hole over the last few years has been rapid and plants are now well established in the birch woodland at the far end. Attempts by Sandnats, BTCV and Jo Miskin's Green Gym to eradicate the plants do not seem to have made much of an impression. Many saplings and seedlings of Norway maple *Acer platanoides* are now growing along the path and on banks in Sot's Hole and may well become as common here as sycamore in years to

come. In 2004 a solitary plant of Great lettuce *Lactuca virosa* was discovered growing along the path above Sot's Hole at the edge of the tree plantation. In 2005 the count had increased to six plants. So far it has not been recorded elsewhere in the Valley. There seems to be no apparent reason for the luxuriant growth of the patches of Nettle *Urtica dioica* growing along the path near the entrance to Sot's Hole.

June

Dartmouth Meadow remains a cause for concern and a mid-month visit to the site by John Shrimpton, Mike Bloxham and myself proved disappointing, with no visible sign of any bee orchids *Orchis apifera*. Three large piles of partly decomposed brushwood occupy a part of the site and nutrients leaching from them are encouraging patches of less desirable vegetation to establish around their base. There is also much regeneration from hawthorn stumps all across the site. Encouragingly, several yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* plants were present along with fairy flax *Linum catharticum* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*. Rough hawk-bit *Leontodon hispidus* was dominant in some areas.

John Shrimpton's annual count of common spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsia* in the wildflower meadow near Forge Lane shows an increase to one hundred and seventy six flowering spikes this year, the colours ranging from almost white to dark-pink. Fox-and-cubs *Pilosella aurantiaca*, another feature of this meadow, also appears to be on the increase. The colony of planted Japanese iris *Iris Japonica*, in the small dewpond in the corner of this meadow, now completely covers the bed of the pond and may need controlling if some of the more choice native species to be found here are to survive.

July

In recent years Red House Park has not received much attention from Sandnats, so an opportunity for me to record the section that lies in SP0494 for the Birmingham and Black Country Flora Project was seized upon during this month. The area consists largely of grassland and flowerbeds. The grassland is relatively uninspiring except along the edges, where weedkilling has left a narrow strip of bare soil enabling quick germinating annuals to exploit the situation. Both here and in some of the less well-tended flower beds in the park, swine-cress *Coronopus didymus* and small nettle *Urtica urens*, along with the more usual annuals associated with bare ground, can be found. Several patches of nettle-leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium* were noted in shade to the rear of gardens backing onto the park.

Wherever one walks along the pavement of most roads and streets of Birmingham and the Black Country, a similar urban flora is encountered. It tends to be a mixture of garden escapes, annuals typical of disturbed ground and persistent perennials that can withstand a certain amount of trampling, such as plantain, daisy, dandelion, knot-grass and clover. Plants occupy cracks in paving, driveways, brickwork of garden walls, the base of street trees and any suitable areas of disturbance. The roads surrounding Redhouse Park are like this and some of the more interesting species recorded near the park included snapdragon *Antirrhinum majus*, Californian poppy *Eschscholzia californica*, sweet alison *Lobularia maritima* and lemon balm *Melissa officinalis*. One plant, which I had not encountered elsewhere in this area, was discovered growing from the back of paving at the foot of a garden wall in Jayshaw Avenue. A piece of the plant was taken and sent to 'Alien Plant' specialist Eric Clement for his expert opinion. He confirmed it as canary clover *Dorycnium hirsutum*, a member of the Fabaceae or Pea family, a sub-shrub with soft, hairy, grey leaves and white flowers with a maroon keel. This rather attractive small shrub attains a height of a metre or so and is occasionally grown in gardens. I have been reliably informed that the two foot high specimen discovered had probably originated from seed which can take up to two years to germinate. It has been accepted as a first record for this species for VC39 Staffordshire.

A great deal of clearance work has been carried out in Gorse Farm Wood during the past year under the supervision of Jo Miskin. For the second consecutive year large areas of bracken have been flattened with a log chained behind a horse and dragged across the site. The theory is that bruising and damaging the stems of actively-growing plants, without actually severing them, encourages the sap to continue rising which ultimately weakens the plants. A comparison of a treated and untreated area certainly displayed a considerable decrease in height of plants that had been flattened during the previous year, compared with the height of non-flattened plants. The colony of wood horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum* in Gorse Farm Wood continues to thrive and may even be on the increase. A boardwalk is envisaged for this area and some removal of rank vegetation is tentatively planned. On the grassy bank, between the houses and woodland, several large specimens of garden tree-mallow *Lavatera thuringiaca (olbia)* are now well established.

On another visit during this month to the set aside field off Salter's Lane I discovered a significant new native species. Two plants of large-flowered

hemp-nettle *Galeopsis speciosa* were found along the bank of the ditch, and a further three plants were growing in with other arable weeds nearby. It would be difficult to separate this species from common hemp-nettle *Galeopsis tetrahit* when not in flower, but the attractive pale-yellow flowers with a darker lower-lip and purple central lobe are twice the size of the latter and very showy. There have been very few reports of large-flowered hemp-nettle in Staffordshire in recent years, and it is hoped that regular disturbance of the soil will continue thereby enabling this annual species to build up a considerable quantity of seed, and hopefully become firmly established in Sandwell Valley for many years to come. Among other arable weeds found in the same area were field pansy *Viola arvensis*, corn spurrey *Spergula arvensis* and a considerable number of red goosefoot *Chenopodium rubrum* which were particularly abundant near the farm manure dumping area. In recent years this species has increased in frequency considerably in Sandwell Valley, Birmingham and the Black Country.

August

Twiggy mullein *Verbascum virgatum* continues to survive in the safety of its island refuge in Forge Mill Lake, growing alongside its cousin great mullein *Verbascum thapsus*.

During this month a solitary plant of hollyhock *Alcea rosea* was noted growing at the top of the motorway bank near to the Newton Road bridge. The large spike of pale-yellow flowers was noticed as I travelled along the M5 motorway. A closer inspection a few days later from the safety of the footpath along Newton Road confirmed the identification. Mystery surrounds how this 'garden escape' found its way here.

September

On a previous visit to the set aside field in July I had been attracted to the large colony of watercress growing in the nearby ditch. Flowering was then quite prolific, but on this occasion when fruiting would have been expected, very few seed-pods were present and these tended to be shrivelled or containing only two or three well-developed seeds. This is the hybrid water-cress



**TWIGGY
MULLEIN**

Rorippa x sterilis and according to Stace's Flora it often occurs in the absence of either of its two parents *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum* or *R. microphyllum*

October

Last winter the Rangers removed by hand a large quantity of floating water-pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*, however the plants colonising Park Farm pool appear to be spreading which proves the rapid growth capacity of this undesirable invader. At present there are no reports of it appearing elsewhere in the Valley, but I have recently seen the same species for sale at £2.00 per pot and misnamed as *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* in a local aquatic centre. Work is being carried out to construct a path in Park Farm Wood to accommodate wheelchair users. A walk along the existing path with Matt Hadlington was carried out this month to check the possible impact this might have on the ground flora alongside it. One plant of broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* was discovered near to the path and there were five more plants found within the woodland. It was concluded that there was no danger of disturbance to any of the plants found.

Recording work on a proposed 'Flora for Birmingham and the Black Country' entered its ninth recording season. It is hoped that at the end of 2006 all squares within the survey area will have at least one hundred species recorded from them. Already writing-up and collection of suitable photographs for inclusion has begun. It is proposed that a disk of typical habitat photographs and some of the more notable species discovered be included with the book. Anyone who might have suitable material for inclusion should get in touch with either Sara Carvhallo at the Wildlife Trust. or me.

Sandwell Valley new botanical records for 2005

Brassicaceae - *Rorippa x sterilis* - hybrid water-cress / ditch near set aside field / large patch

Fabaceae - *Dorycnium hirsutum* - canary clover / paving along Jayshaw Avenue / one

Lamiaceae - *Galeopsis speciosa* - large-flowered hemp-nettle / set aside field / five plants

Valerianaceae - *Valerianella carinata* - keeled-fruited cornsalad / near bridge over R Tame Forge Mill / locally frequent

Mike Poulton

Mammal Report 2005

Occasional non-specific shrew sightings were recorded by both Valley Rangers, RSPB, staff & visitors. The RSPB centre sightings throughout the year included, hedgehog, red fox, weasel, stoat, wood mouse, field vole, grey squirrel and brown rat.

Rabbits have again been recorded in the Hill Top area and the Rangers have reported large numbers in Golf Course Wood. Again we have no recent sightings of hare. Please keep looking.

Badgers have been seen in the Valley on a number of occasions throughout 2005 and may be considered resident again. For conservation reasons, we do not give the location of any set.



Various bat species were observed in flight on our monthly meetings throughout the summer. Both noctule and pipistrelle bats were recorded and appear to still be roosting in the Park Farm area. A new addition to the Valley mammal list came with the sighting of a large number of serotine bats feeding over the boating pool in Dartmouth Park when Matt Darby & Chris Sherlock were recording on their Bat Evening.

Our first records of a ‘barking’ muntjac were confirmed when the creature was seen on a couple of occasions in the Park Farm area.

Casualties on the Valleys road side verges confirmed the presence of, red fox, grey squirrel, brown rat and a single muntjac deer which was reported on the Newton Road.

This recent evidence suggesting badger, serotine bat and muntjac deer are fully resident in the Valley also enabled us to raise the total mammal species recorded last year to 20 - the best the ‘Valley’ has produced since I started recording small mammals back in the early seventies. Mammals are not the easiest of subjects to find at the best of times, let alone identify and we may still have a few more species of bat to add to our lists. Our entire recorded list now stands at 23 species, so many thanks to all who

have contributed records. These came from Lee Coplestone, his Staff, Volunteers and the RSPB's centre's daily diary. Others were provided by John Stokes, the Park Farm Ranger team, various Sandnats members (notably Paul Essex and Janet Granger), and my own sightings and road causality list.

MAMMALIA (Mammals)

ORDER: INSECTIVORA (Insectivores)

Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	RC & VS
Mole	<i>Talpa europaea</i>	MH
Common Shrew	<i>Sorex araneus</i>	VS

ORDER: CHIROPTERA (Bats)

Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>	VS
Serotine	<i>Eptesicus serotinus</i>	VS BD
Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	VS

ORDER: LAGOMORPHA (Hares & rabbits)

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

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

ORDER: CARNIVORA (Carnivores)

Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	VS
Stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>	VS
Weasel	<i>Mustela nivalis</i>	VS
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	RC & VS

ORDER: ARTIODACTYLA (Even-toed ungulates)

Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	VS. RC
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Key to Mammal recording method:

BD.	Bat Detector	MC.	Mating Call
CC.	Cat Capture	MH.	Mole Hills
CB.	Captive Breeding & Release Programme	RC.	Road Causality
LT.	Live Trap	VS.	Visual Sighting
		HC.	Heron Capture

Amphibian Report 2005

Only average numbers of frogs, toads and newts listed below were recorded in 2005. Our rapidly expanding Heronry might be a cause for concern with regard to our future amphibian population. Unfortunately no great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* adults or larvae were reported.

The Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* that was unearthed in August last year on the bark chippings pile has not been seen again. No other reptile sightings were received in 2005 but none were anticipated.

AMPHIBIA (Amphibians)

ORDER: CAUDATA (Newts)

Smooth newt *Triturus vulgaris*

ORDER: SALIENTIA (Frogs & toads)

Common toad *Bufo bufo*

Common frog *Rana temporaria*

AJP.



Back to Basics !

Put correct captions under these pictures supplied by Andy !!

Bulletin contributors were Matt Darby & the rangers, Janet Granger, Jane Hardwick, Andy Mabett, Lynn & Mike Poulton, Paul Smith (&RSPB staff), Terry Parker, Andy Purcell, Pete Shirley, Malcolm Smart and Tony Wood. The colour photo at the front is, as usual, the work of Andy Purcell and features the heron – now rapidly becoming the centre of attraction for all visitors to Priory Woods. Two line drawings made for this number are after Robert Gillmor (Owl) and Keble Martin (Twiggy mullein).

**DON'T FORGET TO VISIT
THE SANDNATS
WEBSITE.**



**WITH WELL OVER 1200 HITS PLUS AN AWARD, YOUR
SITE NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT ! MAKE CONTACT-SEE THE
INFORMATION & ADD YOUR OWN INPUT!**

**FIND: CLUB DETAILS- PUBLICATIONS- CURRENT LIST OF
WILDFLOWERS ETC.**

At:

[Http://freespace.virgin.net/william.moodie/sandnats.htm](http://freespace.virgin.net/william.moodie/sandnats.htm)

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

**THE CLUB IS GRATEFUL TO BILL MOODIE & CLARE HINCHLIFFE FOR
MAINTAINING THIS WEBSITE**

There is no fungus report in this edition because the previous number (Fungi of the Sandwell Valley) gave a comprehensive account of their current status. As usual, following the publication of this work, several new records have been added. These will probably appear in the 2006 Annual Report.

Grafton Wood (Worcestershire) May 20th

Our series of early summer visits to other areas continues at this beautiful ancient woodland site. Leader for the day is John Tilt (Manager of the Wood). This is an event not to be missed. The visit promises something to all who love wildlife. Don't miss it ! Final arrangements available soon.

MEMBERSHIP

If you wish to enrol as a member please send the following detail NAME,
ADDRESS, PHONE No, STAMP ADDRESSED REPLY ENVELOPE

To: **Marian Brevitt, 165 Queslett Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B436DS**

CHEQUE / P.O. MADE PAYABLE TO **SVNC** FOR:

Adult membership £15 Family membership £21
Student / Senior citizen £11

Events Programme 2006

April 8th (Sat.) 1.00p.m (Park Farm) **Sandwell Valley Safari** Matt Darby (SCR)
May 20th (Sat.) 1.30 pm **Grafton Wood (Worcestershire)** John Tilt (Reserve Manager)
June 21st (Wed) 6.45 p.m. **Ray Hall Orchid Survey** Mike Poulton
July 5th (Wed) 7.00 p.m (Park Farm) **Mammal Survey** Paul Essex & Janet Granger
August 19th (Sat.) 1.30 p.m. **Oldacre Valley, Cannock Chase** Andy Jukes (Staffs Trust)
Sept. 6th (Wed.) 6.45 pm **RSPB Reserve. 20th Anniversary Walk & Talk.**
Lee Copplestone
Oct. 4th 7.00 p.m. (RSPB) **Fungi** Bill Moodie
Oct 14th (Sat) 1.30 pm **Earlwood** (John Little biennial fungus foray) Bill Moodie
Nov. 1st (Wed.) 7.00 p.m (RSPB). **Members' Short Presentations.** (4 speakers)
Dec. 6th (Wed.) 7.00 pm (RSPB) **Christmas Social**

PLEASE NOTE THAT CORRECTIONS AND/ OR ADDITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS
MAY BE FOUND IN THE REGULAR CLUB NEWSLETTERS.

Other events are organised during the year. They may be fund- raising (e.g. socials) or
may involve Sandwell Valley events (e.g. RSPB & Sandwell Show) or joint meetings
with other societies .

This Bulletin is published in July, November and March.

The March issue is the Club's Annual Report

Items for the next issue (Volume 29 No.1)
should be sent by June 30th. 2006 to the Editor

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