

SANDNATS BULLETIN



**MISTLE THRUSH AT 1. ST JOHN'S CLOSE
FEBRUARY 9th 2007**



Volume 29 No. 2 MARCH 2007

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.

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EDITORIAL

2006 is now behind us and it saw arguably the greatest increase of momentum in the global warming debate since Kyoto. Real concern about the future of the planet is now a factor in the thinking of government and has also to figure in the agenda of wildlife groups. It is to be hoped that government does seek much more significantly to consult and indeed to cherish its wildlife agencies because they have most certainly been devoted to pursuing true concepts of conservation and sustainability, in contrast to the majority of other organisations that have dominated thinking at leadership levels for so long. However, if organisations such as ours are decisively drawn into this arena of national discussions, we have to ensure that our input is cogent and coherent. Review of Sandnats constitutional aims, its past record and its future potential are extremely important. Currently the concept of biodiversity is under the spotlight again – we must ensure that it is not constrained by arbitrary limits to what is politically convenient. There is no doubt that we have recorded well and done our best to establish the importance of the Valley as wildspace, but we need to be imaginative as we consider the future. Many members are currently called on in advisory capacities in wildlife matters, some as experts but most as sounding boards with regard to good practice in local conservation, but we cannot escape the need to examine the image and relevance of the club on a continuous basis so that wider challenges ahead are a regular consideration in all we set out to achieve.

This report contains plenty of material and writers are thanked for their hard work. We have several newcomers to the Valley (including an extra deer and a new butterfly– note the difference in biomass!). Our fungus list additions are considerable and we ought to be delighted to have three regular mycologists (David Antrobus, Bill Moodie and Nick Williams) who do such sterling work. Few other British societies are so fortunate. We also welcome a new artist, Sarah Pullar, to assist with illustration. She is Membership Information Assistant at Sandwell RSPB and three of her pictures await you in the pages to come. Dan 'Earthquake' Cooper also writes for the first time, giving a watery viewpoint from Swan Pool.

Currently the bulletin seems to be settling down to two editions per year, the October one (which seems to be concentrating on a single subject such as Fungi in 2005 and memoirs in 2006) and the annual report which retains its traditional approach. My own position sees this as a sustainable state of affairs. We never really had enough material for four editions, and currently our output fits quite nicely into two. As you will all have noticed, Margaret Shuker has taken to providing excellent basic meeting reports in the Club newsletters (although we still include enhanced reports of some field meetings here). We hope this service meets the needs of members.

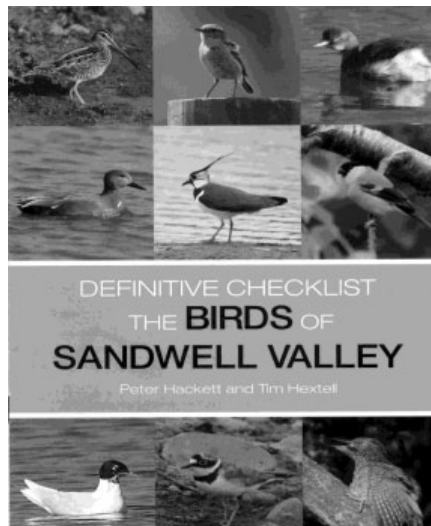
Chairman's Report 2007

As usual our indoor and outdoors meetings were well attended: unfortunately, due to working a shift pattern, I was unable to get to most meetings, but this should change in September when I retire. The one outdoor event I did manage to make was the fungi foray in September- the weather was brilliant! Why can't it be like that for all our outdoor meetings? It was nice to see some new faces at the few indoor meetings I did get to. I believe some have decided to swell our ranks and wish them many enjoyable times together with SANDNATS.

The Friends of Sot's Hole Group is now well established and has secured quite a lot of funding. A part of this money has already been put to use in enabling some sycamore thinning (mainly at the entrance) and in creation of a standing water area below the main dam. In future this should allow schools to carry out pond dipping. There is also money earmarked for improvements to the paths and entrance.

We have funded another publication, albeit a smaller one, namely a Check List of the Birds of The Sandwell Valley. I would like to thank Andy Purcell and Pete Hackett for all their hard work in putting this publication together.

Lastly, a big 'thank you' to Frances for all the work she has put in on the Club finances. The whole committee has been well aware of some of the problems she has solved whilst managing our accounts during her years as our treasurer.



The Sandwell Valley Naturalists' Club

Statement of Income and expenditure for the Year to 31 December 2006

<u>INCOME</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2005</u>
Membership & visitors	424	424
Donations	6	226
Garden Party	238
Sundry Receipts	--	
Refreshments	24	29
Raffles	96	86
Sale of nuts, seeds etc	<u>8</u>
	128	115
Annual Dinner	269	176
Severn Trent Water – net dividend	...	118
Bank Interest	92	4
Sale of 'Birds of the Sandwell Valley'	102	379
Sales of 'Fungi of the Sandwell Valley'	<u>142</u>
	244	379
Rent Reserve from earlier years, not required	<u>105</u>
	<u>1506</u>	<u>1442</u>
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>		
Room Rental	150	175
Printing, Stationery & Postage	373	204
Printing 'Checklist of Birds of Sandwell Valley'	497
Printing 'Fungi of Sandwell Valley'	666
BTCV - Membership	35	30
Insurance	156	156
Wildlife Trust Fee	28	28
Annual Dinner	286	184
Lecturers' fees & Donations	25	170
Expenses re transfer & eventual sale of shares (Severn Trent).	46
	<u>1550</u>	<u>1659</u>
<u>Excess of expenditure over Income for the Year</u>	(44)	(217)
Proceeds from sale of Severn Trent shares		903
	<u>£(44)</u>	<u>£686</u>

We have prepared this Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2006 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 15 January 2007.

The Sandwell Valley Naturalists' Club

CASH ACCOUNT

Balances at 31 December 2005		£
Yorkshire Bank Current Account		811.33
Monthly Premium Account		<u>5504.35</u>
		6315.68
Less: Reserves for Secretary's Expenses	94.17	
Room rental (2002)	<u>105.00</u>	
		<u>199.17</u>
		6116.51
Less: Excess of Expenditure over income for The year		<u>43.73</u>
Balances at 31 December 2006		<u>6072.78</u>

Represented by:

National Westminster Bank Current Account		503.93
Reserve account		<u>5596.85</u>
		6100.78
Less: Reserve of Wildlife Trust Fee (2006)		<u>28.00</u>
		<u>6072.78</u>

Note

Book account as at 31 December 2006 'Birds of Sandwell Valley'

Cost of 1000 copies			3250.00
Complimentary, display & damaged copies - 58 at cost		188.50	
Sales	441		2712.35
Stock in hand	<u>501</u>	at cost	1628.25
	<u>1000</u>		
Profit on sales to date			<u>1279.10</u>
			<u>4529.10</u>
			<u>4529.10</u>

Frances Hudson (Hon. Treasurer).

Extended Reports for Meetings & Events during 2006

Sandnats Field Trip Saturday 20th May 2006 Grafton Wood Nature Reserve, Worcestershire

Eleven Sandnats members car-shared their way to Grafton Wood not far from Junction 6 on the M5 one Saturday morning in May. We parked near a pretty church with stunning views to the Malverns and Bredon Hill and were greeted by the sound of a cuckoo. We put on stout footwear or wellies as our guides John and Miriam Tilt advised us that the wood was on Lias clay and there had been a lot of rain.

The weather was overcast and rainy which proved less than kind to the photographers and insect enthusiasts present- however the wood is spectacular and worth a visit in any weather. John gave us leaflets about the wood and the Brown Hairstreak butterfly, which is declining nationally but has a stronghold in Grafton Wood. John went on to explain that the wood had been on the site since Saxon times and the last woodman to work it, who died in 2004, was buried in the churchyard beside us. Grafton Wood, a remnant of the Forest of Feckenham, is an ancient wood (an ancient wood is one that has been in continuing existence since before 1600) which has always been used by people. The wet clay made the area unsuitable for pasture or arable crops but the wood could be coppiced or pollarded and the timber used for fencing, fuel etc. We saw a magnificent 400 year old pollarded oak as well as several huge ash stools which had developed following coppicing. The great length of time without change of use has meant that a magnificently rich array of flora and fauna has had the opportunity to develop.

The wood, an area of about 150 acres, has been owned jointly by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation since 1997. It has SSSI status and is managed mainly to provide habitat for the Brown Hairstreak butterfly. This pretty butterfly is declining in the UK and Ireland generally, probably because of management practices such as flailing of hedges which kills the eggs. Countryside stewardship schemes and interested farmers have enabled the Brown Hairstreak to increase their numbers in Grafton Wood and the surrounding area. White eggs are laid, usually singly in late summer, on young blackthorn twigs. These are quite conspicuous and volunteers comb the wood for them in winter and mark their position with red tape to get an idea of numbers. We saw some of them and Miriam asked us to check whether the egg was intact or had a small hole at the top. The hole indicates that the larva has hatched. This usually occurs in late April at bud-burst. We didn't spot any of the tiny green caterpillars but we could see where they had been munching on the leaves. The best time to see the actual butterflies is late

August, early September when John and Miriam run a Brown Hairstreak Day.

During our walk we saw many beautiful plants; some that grow well in wet places such as ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* and creeping jenny *Lysimachia nummularia* as well as ones that grow well on lime such as dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, hairy st. john's wort *Hypericum hirsutum* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. There was also a liberal sprinkling of orchids including early purple *Orchis mascula*, common spotted *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and greater butterfly *Plantanthera chloranthera* – so we had to watch where we put our feet to avoid trampling them.

The reserve welcomes volunteers to help with management and surveys of wildlife. Our own Andy Purcell spotted a glow-worm larva which our Leaders had not previously seen on site and it will now be added to the wildlife database.

As we made our way back Mike Poulton spotted a male Orange tip butterfly with wings tightly folded and well camouflaged on a willow shoot. The photographers among us were quick to take advantage of its reluctance to move.

John and Miriam Tilt have helped manage the reserve for Worcester Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation since 1997 and know the area and its wildlife intimately. We were very lucky to have them as our guides for an inspirational field trip.

Plants in flower:

Ajuga reptans, Bugle
Anthriscus sylvestris, Queen Anne's Lace
Arum maculatum, Lords and Ladies
Bellis perennis, Daisy
Cardamine pratense, Cuckoo flower
Carex flacca, Glaucous sedge
C. pendula, Pendulous sedge
C. remota, Remote sedge
C. sylvatica, Wood sedge
Crataegus laevigata, Midland hawthorn
C. monogyna, Hawthorn
Euonymus europaeus, Spindle
Euphorbia amygdaloides, Wood spurge
Fragaria vesca, Wild strawberry
Geranium robertianum, Herb Robert
Geum urbanum, Herb Bennet
Glechoma hederacea, Ground-ivy
Hyacinthoides non-scriptus, Bluebell



Juncus effusus, Soft rush
Luzula campestris, Field wood-rush
L. multiflora ssp congesta, Heath wood-rush
M. sylvatica, Wood forget-me-not
Melica uniflora, Wood melick
Mercurialis perennis, Dog's mercury
Milium effusum, Wood millet
Myosotis arvensis, Field forget-me-not
Orchis mascula, Early purple orchid
Paris quadrifolia, Herb Paris
Primula veris, Cowslip
Ranunculus auricomus, Goldilocks buttercup
R. bulbosus, Bulbous buttercup
R. repens, Creeping buttercup
Veronica chamaedrys, Germander speedwell
V. montana, Wood speedwell
V. serpyllifolia, Ivy-leaved speedwell
Vicia sepium, Bush vetch



FIELD WOOD RUSH

Plants not in flower:

Betonica officianalis, Bettony
C. palustre, Marsh thistle
Circaea lutetiana, Enchanter's nightshade
Cirsium arvense, Creeping thistle
Dactylorhiza fuchsia, Common spotted orchid
Dipsacus fullonum, Teasel
Filipendula ulmaria, Meadowsweet
Hypericum hirsutum, Hairy St John's-wort
H. tetrapterum, Square-stemmed St John's-wort
Lonicera periclymenum, Honeysuckle
Lychnis flos-cuculi, Ragged robin
Lysimachia nummularia, Creeping jenny
Plantanthera chloranthera, Greater butterfly orchid
Primula vulgaris, Primrose
Pulicaria dysenterica, Common fleabane
Rosa arvensis, Field rose
Rumex sanguineus, Wood dock
Scrophularia auriculata, Water figwort
Sedum telephium, Orpine
Stachys sylvatica, Hedge wound-wort
Urtica dioica, Common nettle

Ferns:

Dryopteris filix-mas, Male fern

D. dilatata, Broad buckler fern

Trees:

Fraxinus excelsior, Ash

Acer campestre, Field maple

Prunus spinosa, Blackthorn, Sloe

Spruce: planted

Austrian pine: planted

Oak

Other Observations:

Rust on *Rumex sanguineus*

Orange tip butterfly, male

Brown hair streak butterfly eggs
on blackthorn

Glow worm, female

Badger sett, active (*Badger picture taken by Andy Purcell elsewhere*)



Visit to Oldacre Valley (Cannock Chase) on August 19th 2006.

Readers will have read Margaret's report on the visit. They will remember accounts of finds, but will not have seen the picture below (© British Plant Gall Society) of the *Dasineura hygrophila* gall on *Galium uliginosum* found that day. *Dasineura* midges are small flies which often produce mines and galls on a variety of plants. The galls (which are usually many times larger than the insects that caused them) can be conspicuous. This was another first for Mike Poulton, because gall scientists have never previously recorded this fly as using *G. uliginosum* as a host (an alert observer with good botanical knowledge will often notice galls).

Last year's Thor's Cave visit saw another first for British Cecidology (the science of plant gall study) - again because of Mike's alert field work. Can he, or any another Club member make it a hat-trick of original discoveries in 2007? Don't miss any of the coming field meetings!



November Meeting

Considerable interest and variety was provided by 4 speakers on the evening of Wednesday November 1st. Pete Shirley (with jet lag) began by mentioning his recent visit to The Great Dismal Swamp in North America. Then - having seen *Sciurus carolinensis* on the White House lawns - Pete read an amusing extract from the sports section of the Washington Post, describing how grey squirrels fed early settlers, and how they still provide sport and food - for the adventurous - today.

Our president John Shrimpton then gave us an historical tour of Hill House Farm. We heard of its Tudor beginnings, its connection with Trafalgar, and how Charles Dickens developed his view of the Black Country, while staying there. The Hill House ghost was also mentioned. Lastly John showed us slides of the farm fields through the seasons, reflecting on his boyhood memories, and expressing concern that some farmyard buildings may be demolished for new development.

Next Paul Essex told us of his attempt to reintroduce harvest mice to the Valley. We heard that, over a period of four years, 480 mice were released, and – to the great disappointment of the breeders – there have been no recaptures and no positive sightings since. We have to take into account that this is Britain's smallest mammal - weighing as little as a 20p piece, and that it is at the bottom of the food chain. Paul and his team have put in a great deal of hard work, so this is a disappointing result, but who knows??? One development is that it is hoped to reintroduce harvest mice to Sutton Park, and Paul will be helping.

Finally Tony Wood completed the evening with his excellent flower slides. It's not surprising that Tony has recently gained a photographic award.

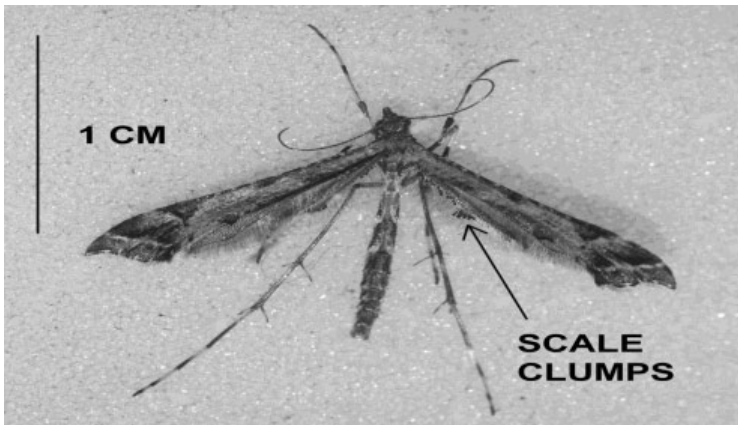
Margaret Shuker & Mike Poulton

Entomology Report

This year brought us yet another new butterfly, White Letter hairstreak being noted on 14th July by Pete Hackett in his garden, adjoining the densely wooded banks of the Tame Valley Canal at High Bridges. I have a record for it from Halesowen and there are several tentative reports from other parts of the Black Country. Maybe a steady regeneration of English Elm is encouraging the return of what was probably a familiar insect in past times. 2006 was a good year for Clouded yellow- there were Valley sightings and it was present near Selfridges in central Birmingham on 25th July (the rapid, powerful flight of this insect enables it to appear in all sorts of unlikely places and the same applies to the Emperor dragonfly which surprised me on a traffic island at Jennens Road/ Lawley Middleway.

One of the most surprising things is that we have yet to record any spectacular occasional butterflies or moths. The warmer years have seen Camberwell Beauty sightings from several places and Humming Bird hawk moth was reported from many Midland locations during 2006. Can you add records for Birmingham & the Black Country?

The Chairman is longing for his retirement date to arrive so he can divert his energy into continuing studies on local moths! With a little more fieldwork together we should soon manage to produce a special edition devoted to Valley Lepidoptera. Currently the Valley moth list contains some 540 species. The latest one to be added is a plume moth (*Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*). This is a conspicuous creature with tufts of scales in the rear wing margins. It is probably present in the gardens, greenhouses and conservatories of most Club members because the larvae use a wide range of foodplants, including household *Geranium* sp. I am indebted to Dave Grundy for confirming the identification.



Those of us who attended Lee Copplestone's meeting at the RSPB on September 6th found the evening walk spoilt by bad weather, but were lucky that an excellent indoor meeting replacing it contained a first rate presentation on British crickets by John Loach. He introduced us to his latest Valley find, the Long-winged Conehead (*Conocephalus discolor*). This is another insect rapidly expanding its territory in Britain. Andy Jukes (Staffordshire Trust) also found it in Walsall when surveying a few days later. Currently we have two Nationally Notable crickets on the RSPB reserve (following the earlier discovery of Roesel's bush cricket, *Metrioptera Roeselii*). A big surprise is that we have not yet recorded Oak Bush Cricket or Speckled Bush Cricket (covered with tiny reddish spots) anywhere in the Sandwell Valley. I have seen both species in scattered

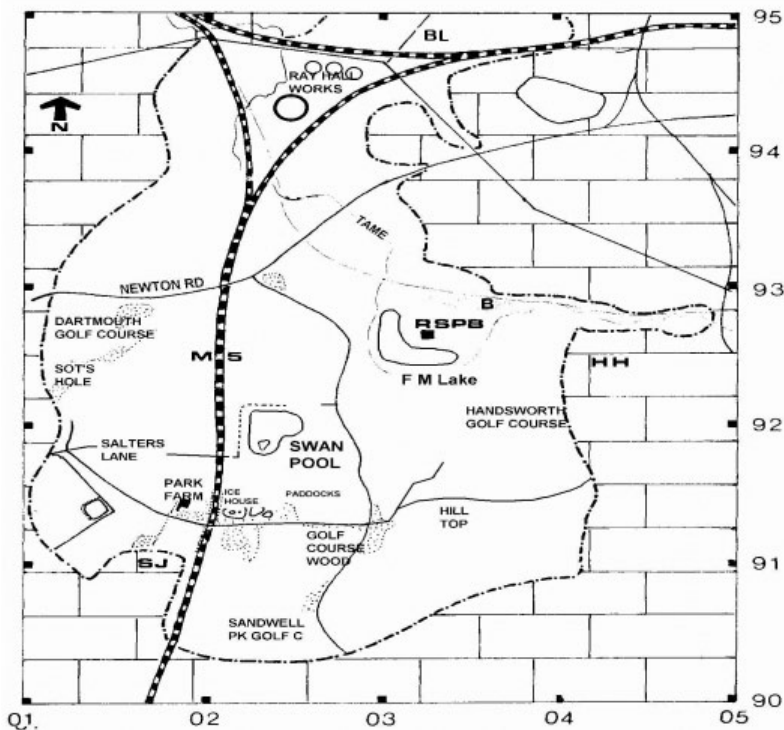
deciduous woodland on the old allotments at Vincent Drive next to the QE hospital in Birmingham. John will search for them during 2007 and if anyone wishes to help, disturbing the lower branches of oak trees in mid- summer with umbrellas or walking sticks with a sheet or picnic blanket on the ground beneath, might get results. Both are about 3 cm long and pale green in colour – the common green grasshopper may be around in the ground layer so remember that crickets have very long antennae. It is frequently possible to recognise them from good close-up photographs.

The list of other insects continues to increase steadily. The mason wasp *Ancistrocerus parietum* was abundant on fennel flowers in my garden this August and a very rare sawfly associated with Meadowsweet in the Forge Mill Lake area is awaiting a trip to Liverpool for its identity to be confirmed.

Editor

SANDWELL VALLEY BIRD REPORT 2006

Our thanks go again to Paul who continues to provide us with a concise summary of the main bird sightings in the Sandwell Valley. The local interest in recording seems in no way diminished and reports such as this are a great starting point for any birder wishing to go further into the circumstances of observations made. The map below may be useful.



JANUARY

A peregrine was seen around the FML area on the 1st and 2nd of the month. Also at FML on new years day were 2 female goldeneye and a water rail. A ring necked parakeet was at the RSPB feeder on the 6th. On the same day, 14 wigeon were present on the River Tame and a cormorant was at FML.

A marsh tit visited the RSPB reserve on the 10th, and 2 willow tits were noted there on the 14th. Also on the 14th, an oystercatcher was at FML, where a female ruddy duck was also noted, and a leucistic (pale coloured) buzzard was seen off Salters Lane.

After the large numbers seen in 2005, waxwing sightings in the area this year were very scarce, however, 2 were seen in Valley Road, Hamstead on the morning of the 15th.

Siskins were seen in good numbers during January, particularly around the Forge Mill area, with a flock of 30 near FMF on the 23rd. Goosander numbers peaked at 44 at FML on the 20th.

A single dunlin was at FML on the 24th. Birds counted there on the 31st included 27 teal, 14 snipe, 57 lapwing and over 700 black headed gulls.

FEBRUARY

Snipe were seen in good numbers during the month with 27 counted in the RSPB marsh and 7 on the lake island on the 1st; 24 in the marsh and 4 on the island on the 10th, whilst a count on the RSPB reserve on the 19th revealed 34 common and 4 jack snipe.

Peak counts for goosander were 43 at FML on the 7th, and lapwing numbers reached 60, also at FML on the 10th.

3 ring necked parakeets were seen at the RSPB reserve on the 4th. 3 goldeneye were on FML on the 7th, and a willow tit was sighted nearby.

On the 17th an oystercatcher was on the RSPB island at FML. A tawny owl was heard in Park Farm Woods on the 28th.

MARCH

6 golden plover were seen flying east over the RSPB reserve on the 4th, and a further 5 were seen over Swan Pool. An oystercatcher was at FML on the 11th, when a woodcock was also seen at FMF. On the following day, a ringed plover was at FML. Also on the 12th, at Sots Hole, 2 treecreepers, 10 siskins and 5 redpolls were seen.

A very unusual sighting for the region occurred on the 15th when a gannet was seen flying east over Swan Pool at 10-30a.m. On the same day, a yellowhammer was singing in the paddocks.

Another rarity on the 17th was a knot at FML. On the 22nd, a little ringed plover was at FML, and a lesser spotted woodpecker was seen in Priory Woods. A curlew was seen flying north over FML on the 25th. Sand martins were in evidence at Swan Pool on the 27th where 40+ were counted together with a single swallow. On the 29th, a ring ouzel was seen near the manure heap at Hill House Farm. By the months end chiffchaff and willow warbler had returned to the Valley. On the 30th, 3 pairs of gadwall were on the RSPB reserve.



APRIL

The month began with some very special sightings. On the 4th, an osprey was reported flying high over Salters Lane at approximately 4-45p.m. On the following day a raven was sighted, also over Salters Lane, whilst on the 6th, a red kite was observed drifting north, high up over FML.

By mid April all of the usual migrants were arriving or passing through, including a ring ouzel (*picture above*) at Hill House Farm seen on the 16th and 17th, and another at FMF on the 23rd.

A welcome sighting near Swan Pool on the 14th was that of a tree sparrow, a once fairly common sight in the Valley but now something of a rarity.

A peregrine was seen near FML on the 17th. A total of 13 common sandpipers were counted at FML on the 20th. Sighted in the paddocks on the 22nd were single lesser spotted woodpecker and tree pipit, whilst the same day a green sandpiper was in the RSPB marsh.

A grasshopper warbler was "reeling" near FML on the 25th. Another green sandpiper and a greenshank were at FML on the 28th.

A pair of garganey were on the RSPB reserve on the 29th. Also on the 29th, lapwing chicks were noted at FML.

MAY.

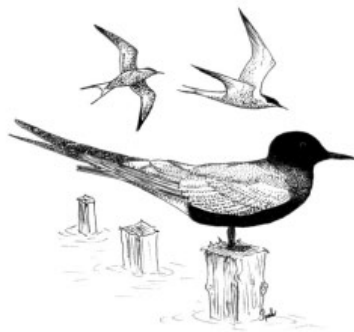
By the 2nd, there were 11 eggs in the blue tit nest box on CCTV at FMF. These hatched on the 12th and it is believed that at least 10 chicks successfully fledged.

Waders seen at FML during the early part of the month included the breeding lapwings and little ringed plovers, a dunlin on the 9th, 2 oystercatchers on the 10th and a redshank on the 11th.

A ring necked parakeet was noted on the RSPB reserve on the 9th but this was one of only occasional sightings this year after last years frequent visits.

A total of 8 reed warblers were on the reserve on the 12th. A hobby was seen to catch a swift over FML on the 19th and was in evidence there again on the following day.

2 cuckoos were heard on the 21st, one in Priory Woods and another from the paddocks. Water Rails were seen and heard from the RSPB marsh during the month and it is possible that a pair bred there. It is also thought that at least 10 pairs of lapwing bred on the reserve and FML producing 16 young. A pair of stonechats also bred off Salters Lane. A tawny owl was seen along Forge Lane at dusk on the 27th.



JUNE

2 black terns (*above*) were seen briefly at FML on the 9th. On the same day, unusually for the time of year, a wigeon was noted in the RSPB marsh, whilst a male garganey was present on FML. 3 oystercatchers were at FML on the 11th.

On the 17th, 4 common terns were on the RSPB island, where 2 pairs of little ringed plover were also seen. On the following day, a pair of gadwall with 5 young were on FML. On the 19th, a single tree sparrow was seen in the paddocks.

6 common sandpipers and a total of 6 little ringed plovers were at FML on the 24th, whilst a single snipe was there on the 28th. On the 29th, a gadwall with 13 young were at FML.

JULY

A total of 12 little ringed plover were at FML on the 5th. A green sandpiper was in the RSPB marsh on the 13th. 2 female redstarts were in the paddocks on the 17th. A greenshank arrived at the RSPB reserve on the 18th and remained in the marsh for the rest of the month.

2 common terns were at FML on the 27th and the following day 2 female redstarts were again seen in the paddocks. Also at the same location on the 28th was a little owl with 3 young.

AUGUST

Up to 4 green sandpipers were around the RSPB reserve during the first half of the month. 2 were seen together with a single greenshank on the 2nd, whilst 2 greenshank were present on the 7th and 8th.

On the 3rd, willow tit and ring necked parakeet were recorded from the Salters Lane area.

A black tailed godwit and a garganey arrived at FML on the 13th, both remaining till the 17th.

A kingfisher was found dead at Park Farm on the 15th, having unfortunately collided with a window. On a happier note, 2 kingfishers were seen at Ice House Pool and one at Swan Pool on the 16th. Also on the 16th, 2 juvenile sparrowhawks were in Priory Woods.

An adult and a juvenile water rail were in the RSPB marsh on the 18th. On the 22nd a little owl, 3 spotted flycatchers and a whinchat were in the paddocks near Swan Pool whilst 3 common sandpipers were by the pool itself.

300+ house martins were observed roosting on the Sandwell Show marquees near Park Farm on the 25th. Noted at Hill Top on the 28th were 30+ whitethroat, 10+ chiffchaff, 30+ blackcap, 10+ willow warbler, 4 redstart, 1 spotted flycatcher and 2 skylark.

SEPTEMBER

A black tailed godwit (having arrived on the 31st August) remained at FML till the 9th, when it was joined by 2 more, all 3 being present for a couple of days.

2 hobbys were seen near FML on the 2nd. On the 3rd, 8 gadwall were present on the lake.

2 yellow wagtails were in the paddocks near Swan Pool on the 4th, whilst 3 spotted flycatchers were there on the 7th. A female wheatear was at Hill Top on the 9th. On the following day, 2 arctic terns were noted flying east over FML.

The middle of the month provided some interesting sightings: on the 14th, a honey buzzard was observed from Hill Top, drifting over the golf course; a little egret was at FML the next day, and an osprey was noted flying south over FML at 12-00p.m. on the 17th. Also, at Swan Pool on the 14th, 19 black terns were counted together with 10 common terns. Ringed plover and hobby were also recorded at FML on the 17th, when a female stonechat was in the RSPB marsh.

A garganey visited Swan Pool on the 23rd and was seen there on and off till the end of the month. Also on the 23rd, a rock pipit was at Swan Pool, whilst on the 25th, 100+ meadow pipits were seen flying south, also at Swan Pool. On the 30th, 12+ snipe were at Swan Pool, and a single jack snipe was on North Island at FML.

OCTOBER

A willow tit was seen near FML on the 4th, whilst on the 13th a marsh tit was noted, also near FML. These very similar species are not easy to tell apart, but we are fortunate to be able to see both species in the Valley, although the willow tit is more often encountered.

Noted at Hill Top on the 8th, were 15+ song thrush, 10 siskin and a single redpoll. Stonechat sightings were to the fore on the 10th with a male in the RSPB marsh, 4 seen near Swan Pool, 3 in fields off Newton Road and up to 3 off Salters Lane.

On the 16th, a rock pipit was on the RSPB island at FML. Wildfowl counts at FML during the month included 7 gadwall on the 18th, 80+ teal on the 19th and 49 shoveler on the 22nd. Also on the 22nd, the first 2 goosander of the winter were noted.

There was a probable sighting of a female ring ouzel off Salters Lane on the 23rd. This elusive species is more often seen on Spring passage in the Valley, although there have been a handful of autumn records.

A total of 6 buzzards were seen over the FMF/FML area on the 24th. On the 26th, a steady passage of redwing was noted over the Valley with approximately 200 being counted between 8.30 and 9.30 a.m.

A tawny owl was seen in Priory Woods on the 26th and again on the following day. 3 black tailed godwit were at FML on the 31st, when a single goldeneye was also present.

NOVEMBER

Sightings at Hill Top on the 5th included 12+ goldcrest, 2 redpoll, 1 fieldfare 3 pheasant and a single little owl.

A harrier was seen drifting north over Park Farm on the 6th, thought most likely to be a hen harrier, with previous sightings having all been at this time of year.

3 ring necked parakeet were noted near FML on the 7th. 3 water rail were heard calling from North Island at FML on the 14th. 21 goosander were present at FML on the 19th, which also saw 15 gadwall on Ice House Pool. A snipe count at the RSPB on the 25th revealed 22 common and 4 jack snipe.

DECEMBER

4 stonechat were near Swan Pool on the 1st. A single dunlin was at FML on the 7th. The following day 5 redpoll were noted in Priory Woods. On the 10th, 17 common snipe were counted on the RSPB reserve.

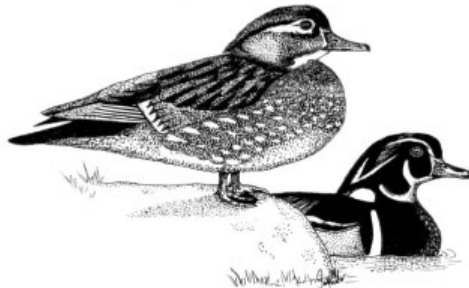
33 goosander were at FML on the 11th and on the same day 30 wigeon and 20 gadwall were on Ice House Pool together with a single little grebe. 49 pochard were at FML on the 12th, and a single ruddy duck was there on the 16th.

On the 18th, a peregrine was seen off Salters Lane. On the 20th, 2 water rail were on the RSPB reserve.

Thanks to staff at Sandwell RSPB Reserve and contributors to their log book, and to staff from Sandwell MBC Countryside Services who provided information for this report.

Paul Smith, Nature Conservation Officer, Sandwell MBC.

(The report contains three of Sarah Pullar's bird drawings and concludes with the picture of wood ducks on the river Tame at the turn of 2006/2007. We hope to see more of her work in future. ED)



NEWS From the RSPB

Staffing announcement by Lee Coplestone (Reserve Manager)

I am delighted to welcome Fran Lancaster to Sandwell Valley reserve. Fran will be covering the temporary Assistant Site Manager post from the end of January until October when Grainne Greene returns from her secondment to Otmoor reserve. Fran joins us from Elmbridge in Surrey where she has been working as a Countryside Ranger.

National Award for Mike West

All SANDNATS members will have been pleased to hear that Mike West (also one of our members) has had years of work in promoting ornithology and nature conservation recognised. For those not aware of the details, Lee has provided me with a copy of the press release. ED.

LOCAL BIRDMAN RECEIVES HIGHEST WILDLIFE HONOUR

Local bird expert, Mike West from Walsall, has been presented with one of the most prestigious honours in the world of birds, the RSPB's President's Award. Only a handful of President's Awards are presented by the RSPB each year to volunteers who have made an outstanding contribution to nature conservation. He was presented with the award by RSPB President Julian Pettifer at the Society's AGM in London on Saturday 7 October.

Mike has volunteered for the RSPB for 14 years. He is a walking encyclopaedia of bird knowledge and helps organise and run public events, farm surveys, exhibitions, bird fairs, talks and the RSPB Sandwell Valley information centre. He is a committee member of the Walsall RSPB local group, has been secretary of the West Midlands Bird Club and the Bardsey Island Bird Observatory, and represents the RSPB on the West Midlands Biodiversity Action Partnership group. Mr West's humour, energy and friendship make him a cornerstone of the West Midlands conservation community.

Mike West said: 'My award is a great honour and I feel very proud. Volunteering is such a great way to improve the quality of life for future generations, enjoy yourself and make life-long friends – I would recommend it to everyone.'

Lee Coplestone, RSPB Sandwell Valley site manager, said: 'Mike is a

huge asset to the RSPB and the community. His energy, enthusiasm and knowledge is remarkable and he deserves immense praise for his contribution to wildlife and society.'

Andy Waters
Public Affairs Officer
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Sandwell Valley Botany Report 2006

February - March

John Shrimpton carried out his annual count of the Valley's snowdrop population and confirmed the following: -

John's Wood now has fourteen flowering plants, Priory Wood plants appear to have died out and there is a reduction near the small pool above Cypress Pool with only three clumps detected. Around one hundred blooms were counted near the Ha-Ha and a similar number in Park Lane. The latter two sites show a considerable increase on previous years. All of the plants appear to be double-flowered except for those at the Ha-Ha site which are single-flowered.

April

Three flowering patches of summer snowflake *Leucojum aestivum*, growing from the bank to the rear of the staff parking area near Park Farm, were a surprise discovery at the start of the month. Why it has the vernacular name 'summer snowflake' is hard to understand, as peak flowering time is during March and April. Stace's Flora includes two subspecies of the plant. Subspecies *aestivum* is believed to be a British native found in the upper reaches of the Thames Valley and its tributaries. Favouring wet, wooded, riverside swamps and meadows it forms large stands when left undisturbed, and is particularly frequent in damp willow carr along the River Loddon in Berkshire, from where it has gained its other common name 'loddon lily'. It is a tuft forming, bulbous perennial reaching a metre or so in height, with drooping snowdrop-like flowers on long stalks. The plants in the Valley however, are likely to be the continental ssp. *pulchellum*. This is the plant normally offered by garden centres and bulb suppliers.

On the same visit, nearby on the far side of the wet area in Park Farm Wood and out of sight and reach of visitors, two patches of primrose *Primula vulgaris* were detected in full flower.

Towards the end of the month a further addition was made to the Valley's plant list when I discovered a specimen of Caucasian-stonecrop *Sedum spurium*, which was growing along the roadside in Ray Hall Road. This patch-forming, pink-flowered Sedum is commonly grown in gardens and persists when discarded.

We now have a record for Mistletoe *Viscum album* thanks to Sandra Oxley who reported a plant growing from a tree to the rear of gardens in Beauchamp Avenue. The offending specimen is on a branch at around shoulder height and is believed to be a female plant. The rear of Beauchamp Avenue opens out onto Hampstead Recreation Ground and is on the edge of the Valley. Andy Mabbett passed on the information and this prompted a visit to the site by John Shrimpton and myself on an April afternoon. Unfortunately, on this occasion we did not find the plant because we looked in the wrong place. Spring had arrived and trees were leafing rapidly so a further visit was deferred until the winter. Mistletoe is found elsewhere in Hampstead and it may well have been transferred naturally by a bird attempting to rid its beak of the fruit's sticky pulp, and in doing so rubbing a seed into a crack in the bark. Mistle-thrushes are particularly fond of the fruit of mistletoe! (*see inside cover picture-Ed*)

May

During the early part of the month John Shrimpton, Tony Wood, Jo Miskin and myself led groups of local people around Sot's Hole to look at the display of bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. It was a successful day with more than fifty people attending the event. Himalayan balsam

Impatiens glandulifera and Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* were looked at and methods of controlling them were discussed. We also explained the need to thin out sycamores to open up the canopy and encourage a more diverse ground flora. The great lettuce *Lactuca virosa* plants first discovered in 2003 growing along the edge of the tree plantation above the woodland in Sot's Hole, have now increased to eight in total. So far no further spread into the Valley has been detected.

June

A report of a visit to Uplands Allotments by Jane Hardwick this month reminded me of the excellent visit by Sandnats a few years ago, when we walked along the many paths through this vast site observing interesting growing techniques and unusual herbs and vegetables grown by the plot owners. From the long list of species recorded by Jane I have singled out a few for comment. Both greater periwinkle *Vinca major* and lesser periwinkle *V. minor* are evergreen trailing plants with attractive mauve flowers, and they often become firmly established in hedgerows and woodland whenever planted or discarded. A colony of the latter is also well naturalised in woodland along Park Lane. Jane recorded three-cornered leek *Allium triquetrum* as self-set, and this becomes a new addition to our checklist. This species has been recorded in a few places elsewhere in Birmingham and the Black Country, and it is a pest species in parts of Devon and Cornwall. She also lists eastern rocket *Sisymbrium orientale*, another plant that appears to be on the increase.

For several years John Shrimpton has made a point of counting common spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* in the wild flower meadow near the pylon. Unfortunately this year he was on holiday at flowering time. On a later than usual visit plants were well past their best, however he informs me that there were many withered spikes at least equal to the previous year's total. He looks forward to doing a more thorough count in 2007.

Our June Sandnats' meeting involved a walk from Pear Tree Drive, along the towpath of the Grand Union canal into Dartmouth Meadows to look for bee orchids *Ophrys apifera*. Almost immediately on joining the canal towpath Jane discovered four spikes of common broomrape *Orobancha minor* growing in the grass strip alongside the canal. It is an uncommon plant in the West Midlands and was last recorded by Bob Normand at virtually the same spot in the early 1990's. Broomrapes are parasitic on the roots of other plants, and in this instance clover is the suspected host plant. In most years when the grass is cut along the towpath the flowering spikes are chopped off before maturity, so we considered ourselves most fortunate to see them intact. Typical canal plants on view included both branched and unbranched bur-reeds *Sparganium erectum* and *Sparganium emersum*, gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata*, great water-dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, clustered dock

Rumex conglomeratum, hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and false fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*. A patch of white water-lily *Nymphae alba* was undoubtedly planted, and the smaller fringed water-lily *Nymphoides peltata*, although looking natural, is also an introduction.

Our first impression of Dartmouth Meadows was disappointing. There was still a considerable pile of rotting hawthorn on the site resulting in a build up of nutrients in the soil which had encouraged rank species to grow around it. Rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus* and several yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* were detected along with a small population of fairy flax *Linum catharticum*. This was encouraging and gave us hope that the site was improving. Eventually one bee orchid was found followed quickly by others. The end result was a total of ten individuals, the best count since 2001. We also recorded three *Dactylorhiza* species, two of them most likely hybrids between common-spotted and southern marsh orchid. On the downside, hawthorn scrub is returning and needs to be removed before it once again invades the site.

July-August

Small mammal trapping with Paul Essex prompted me to spend a little time looking at the flora in Park Farm Wood. Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* is prevalent in some parts and may have contributed to the decline on this site of the population of broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*. In 1994 there were forty-two plants, but on this occasion I could only find nine within the woodland, and an additional one close to the new path. Apart from one isolated plant found by John Shrimpton in Priory Wood back in 1999 it is apparently absent from the rest of Sandwell Valley.

There was a great deal of interest shown by visitors walking around Forge Mill Lake in a display of several hundred attractive, blue flowered plants with pinnate leaves. These were growing on a raised bank of soil taken from a drainage ditch which had been dug alongside the path just outside the boundary of the RSPB Reserve. A seed mix containing phacelia *Phacelia tanacetifolia* had been scattered by Matt Darby and the Rangers earlier in the year after the work had finished. No one could have predicted the wonderful display to follow. *Phacelia* is listed in seed catalogues as an annual, and is recommended for encouraging insects into the garden. When I called on a sunny July afternoon there was an abundance of insect life, particularly bumblebees visiting the flowers.

September-October

The colonisation of the duck pond to the rear of Park Farm buildings by floating pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* is still a concern. Despite efforts by the Rangers to physically remove plants during the winter months it has returned with a vengeance, and the pool is now virtually covered by the plant with very little open water remaining. Growth is rapid

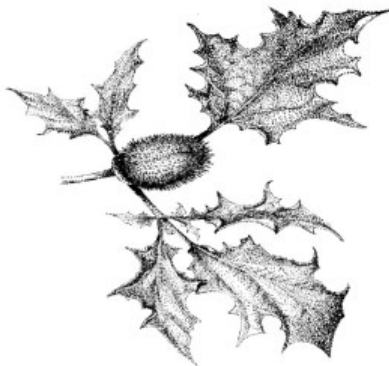
during the summer and a few overlooked fragments can soon re-colonise. A different strategy, using chemicals, may be necessary if we are to eradicate this pest. It is imperative that plants do not reach other Valley pools, and this could easily occur if fragments are carried down by water leaving the pool or attached to the legs or feet of ducks.

November-December

The medlar *Mespilus germanica* in Sandwell Valley has increased in size quite considerably, and during a late autumn visit I noted that it appears to have layered from at least two of the long branches which were touching the ground. In time a small thicket from the original plant could occur. No seedlings have ever been found despite a regular check whenever I visit the site. The bush was laden with fruit with many lying around its base. They were quite soft when squeezed, and reluctantly I tasted one or two which I considered to be just about right for eating. They had quite a slimy texture and a taste that I thought was similar to apple with a hint of caramel.

John's Pool has received quite a lot of attention from the Rangers during the autumn months. They have removed many of the small trees in close proximity to the pool, which will reduce the amount of leaves entering the water. Light levels will increase and hopefully the water quality will improve, encouraging a more diverse flora and fauna.

Matt Hadlington reports the late flowering of a solitary plant of thorn-apple *Datura stramonium* (picture below) at Forge Mill Farm. Interestingly, there have been several sightings of this unusual species throughout Birmingham and the Black Country this summer. Farmer Brown's fields were the regular haunts for thorn-apple back in the late 1980's, but apart from a solitary plant growing in Newton Street allotment a few years ago no others have been reported recently.



Birmingham and the Black Country Flora

Recording work for a proposed 'Flora for Birmingham and the Black Country' entered its tenth season. At the end of 2006 there remain a few squares still under-recorded. Hopefully 2007 will be the last year of recording work. Anyone who would like to submit photographs, particularly interesting habitat shots taken in any part of Birmingham and the Black Country should contact me. We hope to include a collection of photographs in DVD format with the Flora. All slides submitted will be scanned and returned.

Mike Poulton

Sandwell Valley new botanical records 2006

Crassulaceae – *Sedum spurium* Caucasian-stonecrop / Ray hall Road / patch

Viscaceae – *Viscum album* mistletoe / Beauchamp Avenue / one

Liliaceae – *Allium triquetrum* three-cornered leek / Uplands Allotment Gardens / patch

Liliaceae – *Leucojum aestivum* summer snowflake / rear of Park Farm / three patches

ADDITIONS TO THE FUNGI OF THE SANDWELL VALLEY (by Bill Moodie)

We are grateful to Nick Williams of Stourbridge College who has organised regular fungus forays to the valley over the last two years, and is mainly responsible for the content of the list of additions, which have been set out in the same fashion as in the original publication.

ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	NOTES
	(IMPERFECT FUNGI)	
	HYPHOMYCETES	
	<i>Sepedonium chrysospermum</i>	
	(ASCOMYCETES & ASCOLICHENS)	
	(MILDEWS)	
	ERYSIPHALES	
	ERYSIPHACEAE	
	<i>Erysiphe bicornis</i>	

ENGLISH NAME

LATIN NAME

NOTES

(CUP FUNGI & EARTH TONGUES)

LEOTIALES

LEOTIACEAE

Lemon Disco

Bisporella citrina

(FLASK FUNGI)

XYLARIALES

XYLARIACEAE

Beech Woodward

Hypoxyton fragiforme

BASIDIOMYCETES

AGARICALES

AGARICACEAE

Lepiota fulvella

BOLBITIACEAE

*Conocybe percincta**Conocybe subovalis*

COPRINACEAE

Snowy Inkcap

Coprinus niveus

Magpie Inkcap

Coprinus picaceus

Rootlet Brittlestem

Psathyrella micrirhiza

Blueleg Brownie

Psilocybe cyanescens

ENTOLOMATACEAE

Entoloma hirtipes

STROPHARIACEAE

*Galerina clavata**Panaeolus ater*

Verdigris Agaric

Stropharia aeruginosa

TRICHOLOMATACEAE

Blewits

*Lepista saeva**Mycena maculata*

Brownedge Bonnet

Mycena olivaceomarginatas

Blue Spot Knight

*Tricholoma columbetta**Tricholoma ustiloides*

ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	NOTES
	(BOLETES) BOLETALES BOLETACEAE <i>Xerocomus lanatus</i>	
	(FAIRY CLUBS) CANTHARELLALES CLAVULINACEAE <i>Clavulina rugosa</i>	<i>Clavaria</i>
Wrinkled Club		
	(CORTINA TOADSTOOLS) CORTINARIALES CORTINARIACEAE <i>Cortinarius alboviolaceus</i>	
Pearly Webcap		
Pelargonium Webcap	<i>Cortinarius paleaceus</i>	
Veiled Poisonpie	<i>Hebeloma mesophaeum</i>	
White Fibrecap	<i>Inocybe geophylla</i>	
Lilac Leg Fibrecap	<i>Inocybe griseolilacina</i>	
	(PUFFBALLS) LYCOPERDALES (EARTHSTARS) GEASTRACEAE <i>Geastrum triplex</i>	
Collared Earthstar		
	LYCOPERDACEAE <i>Bovista plumbea</i>	
Grey Puffball		
	(BRACKET FUNGI) PORIALES CORIOLACEAE <i>Datronia mollis</i>	
Common Mazegill	<i>Oligoporus albellus</i>	<i>Tyromyces</i>
	(MILK CAPS AND RUSSULES) RUSSULALES RUSSULACEAE <i>Lactarius mitissimus</i>	
Bare Toothed Brittle Gill	<i>Russula vesca</i>	

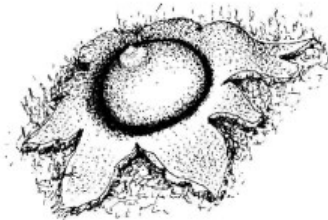
ENGLISH NAME**LATIN NAME****NOTES**

(RUST FUNGI)
 UREDINALES
 COLEOSPORIACEAE
Coleosporium tussalaginis

PHRAGMIDIACEAE
Phragmidium violaceum

(SMUTS)
 USTILAGINALES
 Anemone Smut *Urocystis anemones*

(SLIME MOULDS)
 MYXOMYCETES
 PHYSARALES
 PHYSARACEAE
Badhamia utricularis

Editorial note

The Club continues to be in Bill's debt for the meticulous recording of our fungi. His chief allies in this difficult quest have been mentioned in the editorial, but it is worth noting that, thanks to his instruction over time, other members are beginning to attempt identification of some commoner fungi with increasing success. Readers are again reminded that the layout of the list is in accordance with that adopted in his 'Fungi of the Sandwell Valley' (November 2005). The spectacular display of Collared Earthstar (*illustrated above*) beneath the tall scrub hedge near the King George's Field changing rooms is still visible.

Conservation and Peter Shirley

2006 saw Peter Shirley retire from his post as Regional Director of the Wildlife Trusts after several years of distinguished service and it is a great pleasure to see his return to regular involvement in Valley conservation affairs. His life is extremely busy because, as members would expect, there are a lot of calls on his time by others wishing for advice or support in matters of wildlife conservation or allocation of funding. Here he returns to the fray in an update on one of our sites that has been dear to the heart of the Club since its inception.

Patience Rewarded

About 25 years ago, at a SVNC Committee meeting, Mike Bloxham expressed concerns about the state of Sot's Hole. He was especially worried that the wet hollows, sites of former mill pools, might dry out and thereby change the character of the wood. Very recently a new pool was excavated in one of those hollows, thus alleviating Mike's worries, albeit after a quarter of a century.



The new pool is a symbol of recent renewed interest in Sot's Hole from both Sandwell MBC and local residents. For a few years now Jo Miskin has been doing sterling work as the Council's Local Nature Reserve (Wildspace) Officer. He has worked tirelessly to bring interested people together as the Friends of Sot's Hole. The Chair of this group is Dagger Lane resident Barry Geddes, and SVNC is represented on the Group. Mid-week conservation work parties have cleared rubbish, constructed new steps on to Brown's Farm (see picture) pulled Himalayan balsam and organised events, publicity and interpretation. Some trees, especially

sycamores, have been coppiced to open the woodland canopy, particularly around the Church Vale entrance.



Some of the work (including the excavation of the new pool using a contractor) has been funded through various local charities and the Breathing Places scheme funded through the National Lottery. Further bids are being worked on, one of which will result in a new entrance feature in Church Vale. Other plans include an updated management plan to replace the 1990 one, renewed treatment of Japanese knotweed, path improvements, and contact with adjoining householders to reduce the volume of rubbish appearing in the wood.

The Club's representatives are stressing that long-term objectives, and the basic principles enshrined in the existing management plan, need to be respected in relation both to work now being done and in the new plan. The character of this semi-natural ancient woodland is one of relative 'wildness' in an otherwise neat and tidy suburban setting. (The Bluebell Wood compartment in the middle of Dartmouth Golf Course remains unmanaged, itself a rare condition for small woods in urban areas.) In addition the whole site's value for important, if sometimes relatively obscure, species of invertebrates, fungi, birds and bats should be protected and enhanced. (Interesting birds currently likely to be seen in Sot's Hole include buzzard, sparrow hawk, tree-creeper and great-spotted woodpecker.)

Over the years work has tended to stop and start in Sot's Hole. For a piece of centuries old woodland this is not a big issue, but currently it is receiving more attention, attracting more resources and becoming more

valuable to local people than for some time. By this time next year the school site should be redeveloped and a new generation of local children will be enjoying this wonderful woodland. It is important that the integrity of the woodland is maintained, and that its natural features and values underpin all new activities.

P.R.Shirley

Mammal Report 2006

Only one common shrew record- I found a dead specimen on the path going down to the RSPB pond dipping pool- other occasional non-specific shrew sightings were recorded. I would presume both the common and pygmy shrew populations are remaining stable.

The RSPB Mammal Days & centre sightings throughout the year included, hedgehog, red fox, weasel, stoat, wood mouse, field vole, grey squirrel and brown rat. They found only feeding evidence of water vole but not visual sightings.

Rabbits still seem to be thriving on & around the Valley's golf courses with large numbers at Golf Course Wood and controlling measures have been taken at Sotts Hole.

Again no records of Hare have been reported.

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.

I have not been able to record the Serotine bats feeding on insects over the boating pool in Dartmouth Park (a new 2005 bat record addition). My 20 year old £5 home made bat detector's frequency dial is not accurate enough.

Casualties on the Valley's road side verges confirmed the presence of, hedgehog, red fox, grey squirrel and brown rat.

After the release of some 480 Harvest Mice since Spring 2000 no evidence or sightings have been recorded, although one possible grass ball nest was found by Paul Essex but it was never confirmed as being that of a harvest mouse.

Many thanks to all who have contributed with their sightings, small mammals are not the easiest of subjects to find at the best of times, let alone accurately identify .

My fox sightings for 2006 seem to be considerably lower than in previous years, possibly due to the apparent increase of most of the dog foxes I recorded in 2005 having mange.

The Mammal records for 2006 were compiled from my own visual sightings and road causality list, with aid of records from Lee Copplestone, the Staff, Volunteers & the RSPB's centre's Mammal Days & daily diary. John Stokes, Matt Darby and the Park Farm Rangers, with

three other records from Sandnats members, contributed the remainder. After our first records of a “barking” Muntjac in 2005 were confirmed when the creature was seen on a couple of occasions in the Park Farm area. I’m pleased to report that after the Newton Road 2005 Muntjac casualty record, “barking” Muntjac have still been heard in 2006. With yet another new Deer record in late summer of a Fallow Buck sighting on the side of the M6 by a passing lorry driver who sent a text message to Park Farm, subsequently a fallow buck was sighted on a couple of occasions by Valley Rangers. Perhaps I should ask Sandnats to start budgeting for “Ha-ha” repairs & deer fencing – tehe!

A.J.P.

MAMMALIA (Mammals)

ORDER: INSECTIVORA	(Insectivores)	<u>Capture Method</u>
<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	Hedgehog.	RC & VS
<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
ORDER: RODENTIA (Rodents)		
<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	Wood mouse.	VS, CC & LT
<i>Arvicola terrestris</i>	Water vole.	FE only
<i>Clethrionomys glareolus</i>	Bank vole.	VS
<i>Microtus agrestis</i>	Field vole.	VS, CC, & HC
<i>Mus musculus</i>	House mouse.	VS
<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Brown rat.	RC & VS
<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	Grey squirrel.	RC & VS
ORDER: CARNIVORA (Carnivores)		
<i>Meles meles</i>	Badger.	VS
<i>Mustela erminea</i>	Stoat.	VS
<i>Mustela nivalis</i>	Weasel.	VS
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Red Fox.	RC & VS
ORDER: ARTIODACTYLA		
(Even-toed ungulates) Deer		
<i>Dama dama</i>	Fallow Deer.	VS
<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	Muntjac.	MC

Key to Mammal recording method:

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



Muntjac (A.J.Purcell)

Amphibian Report 2006

The spring sightings from our usual breeding pools in 2006 of frogs, toads and smooth newts appear stable, with the National Weather Centre reported that 2006 had been the warmest year since records began! Is this the sign of global warming.

The Ice House Lake Heronry still remains a cause for concern for our adult amphibian population in the future!

Again no great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* adults or larvae were reported in 2006.

AMPHIBIA (Amphibians)

ORDER: CAUDATA (Newts)

Triturus vulgaris Smooth newt

ORDER: SALIENTIA (Frogs & toads)

Bufo bufo Common toad

Rana temporaria Common frog

REPTILIA (Reptiles)

ORDER: CHELONIA (Turtles & tortoises)

Family: Testudinidae (Tortoises & Terrapins)

Since the Swan Pool "Valleygater" sighting in April 1999 and the subsequent catching of a monster two-and-a-half foot long 20lb North American Common Snapping Turtle *Chelydra serpentina* in July 2001 various reports of unidentified terrapin or fresh water turtles have been circulated. For the passed couple of years I have recorded freshwater terrapins in various Valley Pools and basking on the small islands in Forge Mill Lake. I have sighted them from distance, but thought there to have been two species, the commonest being the Red-eared Turtle *Chrysemus scripta elegans* and also the European Pond Terrapins *Emys orbicularis*. Unfortunately the sightings of these voracious predators have steadily increased. With our milder winters and warmer summers the possible breeding of these irresponsibly released non-native predators could pose a threat to our frog, toad and newt population. I would be interested in any sighting of these creatures in 2007.

The Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* that was unearthed in August 2005 in the bark chippings pile has not been seen again. No other reptile sightings were received in 2006 but none was anticipated.

AJPurcell

From the Committee minutes (12th June 1979– Environmental Centre) Comments

Matters arising from the Minutes

- (a) Sotts Hole: This matter was deferred to the next meeting.
- (b) Annual Dinner: It was decided to hold this function on Thursday, 28th February 1980 at the Martini International Restaurant, and the Secretary was asked to inform members and get some idea of numbers. The cost would be £6.00 per head.
- (c) Purchases: Mrs. Hadley reported that up to the present time, she had not been able to obtain the recommended books, but had been able to get "The Field Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe" published by Collins, which was to be the raffle prize on Saturday, 16th June 1979. She had also obtained samples of containers for specimens, but these were not considered suitable for Club use. The Chairman asked those members engaged on practical work in the Valley to think what equipment they would need which might be obtained through Club funds. The Chairman showed a microscope, a number of which were surplus to requirements at Aston University, and which were offered to the Club at a cost of £15 each. Mr. Busby had agreed to run a course on the use and care of microscopes, and it was decided to purchase two at present.
- (d) Recruitment Material: This matter to be left in the hands of Mr. Jukes and Mr. Bloxham.

Nothing much changes. 'Sotts Hole' has been on the agenda for a good number of meetings from that day to this and has frequently been misspelt.

This was a very nice Annual Dinner, provided that you were able to find the Martini International. It was hidden down a bank ('bonk') in Wednesbury.

The standard fears ('shall we get it in time for the day?' ' the Chairman has asked us to think...') and frustrations (I've gone to the trouble of bringing these damned things and no one wants them) will be familiar the reader.

The microscopes are in existence, I have two in my attic (I hope). They got borrowed twice, but not during this century. If anyone would like to purchase them from the Club, please let me know. They have some historic interest and certainly good optics (standard mags up tp X400). Probably going for a song.

The outcome of this collaboration between the late Mr Jukes & Mr Bloxham remains a matter for conjecture (possibly a few pints of bitter), because membership has remained at a fairly consistent level since the Club was formed.

Editor.

PS. Margaret Shuker has most conscientiously obtained from the Express and Star a photo of Sandnats investigating Monk's Pool circa. 1977. I had intended to copy it here, but as I placed it on the Scanner I spotted the 'no reproduction without permission' notice on the back. You will therefore have to content yourself with the following (Committee Meeting 13th May 1980). No comments are offered.

- | |
|--|
| <p>f) <u>Harp Seals:</u> It was decided to leave this matter until Mr. Shrimpton was present.</p> <p>g) <u>Natural History Societies:</u> Mr. Shirley said that he had started his report but it was not yet finished.</p> |
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MATT'S RANGERS' REPORT



Hello and welcome to another of the Countryside Rangers' annual reports. Unfortunately Adam has decided to leave for pastures new, so we have welcomed another member of staff to the ranks. Hayley Crump has joined us from the Community Liaison Team. She has previously worked on the Local Nature Reserves in the South West of the borough.

Again we have managed to be successful in procuring a large amount of funding from the Forestry Commission and we shall continue to use this to fund access improvements in Priory Woods Local Nature Reserve. The new route will provide an excellent series of circular routes around the pools. These should prevent the problem of fringe damage caused by people making the existing routes wider as they struggle to avoid the mud. We always have more funding ideas in the pipeline- so watch this space!

The team has become experienced in path restoration thanks to our baptism of fire during the previous winter. As you can see from the pictures (*one of which is over-leaf*), the transformation has been astounding. We have also managed to create great controversy, using an old bag of residual stewardship wild bird plant mix during the Forge Mill lake path refurbishment.



We had numerous calls about the fantastic display of Tansy Leaved Phacelia, which appeared abundantly and many insects made themselves at home on the flowers. The mix found its way into the assortment of common species planned for the recovery of the fringes. I can only conclude that the seeds last well over time and that the ground conditions are suitable for that plant.

We have also made some improvements to a number of entrances



around Priory Woods to try and encourage people to enter. By removing overhanging growth and taking down some of the old fencing, we should have made the entrances feel safer and added appeal to the wood. We have continued dead hedging in Golf Course woods with Hazel left over from the initial coppicing. This will protect newly coppiced plants from trampling. Eventually we will have a Hazel product that can be used in or around the Valley.



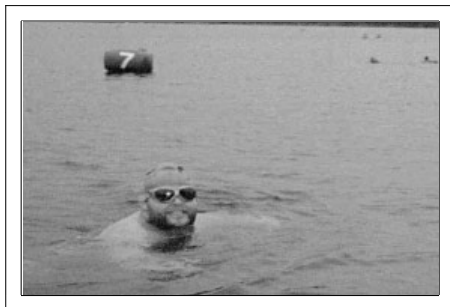
It is good to see the transformation of the muddy pathways that have made life so difficult for visitors to the main attractions of the Valley. They will surely welcome the completion of the project. As you can see from Matt's article and Mike Poulton's botany report, accidents when planting up can happen and members (whilst also welcoming the work) will also hope that a proper regard for the native flora immediately adjoining the path working area remains a priority as the work proceeds.

Editor.

Tales from Swan Pool

By Dan 'Earthquake' Cooper

The 'Earthquake' is a man of many parts and the Sandwell Valley is of great importance to him. Swan Pool is the focus of much of his swimming activity and he has played a big part in promotion & development of the sport here. You can find out more if you visit his website. Here he talks of swans and fish he has met during those long hours in the water in 2005.....



I've swum in Swan Pool now for seven years, 2005 being my fifth winter of uninterrupted weekly swimming in the pursuit of tackling large lakes, various stunts and eventually the channel. This gives me an opportunity to observe the wildlife of the Pool from a unique, if unconventional, perspective. In July of this year I took the position of relief lifeguard for the lake, providing cover and extra assistance to the ranger team at other times.

My knowledge of wildlife is that of a casual observer. I have recorded my observations as accurately as possible and invite those better versed in these matters to interpret for themselves the information I have gathered.

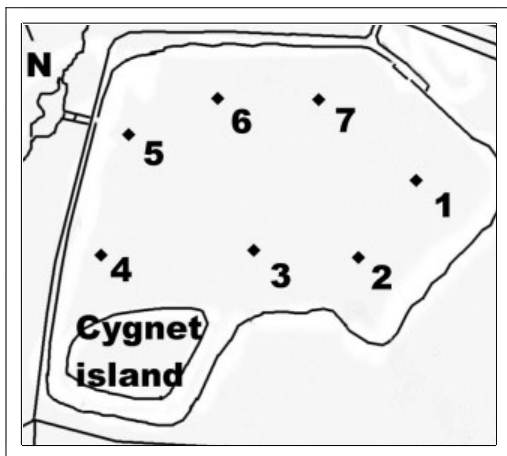
I have found that my yearly swimming programme (120 or so occasions each year) has endeared me to the resident pairs of swans, and have found that they not only have no fear of me, but also come quite close- usually at dusk. These encounters have, for the past few years included a parade of the new youngsters and these 'swim pasts' occur no matter what my speed or stroke at the time. It is only in the nesting period and the first few weeks after hatching that the adults and new cygnets keep their distance.

Luck appeared to favour one pair this year, successfully rearing four fine cygnets from a nest on the island, although one did disappear from the nest without trace when still quite small. The other pair did not fare so well. Their first attempt at nesting near the main tarmac path was doomed by public scrutiny and the unwanted attentions of dogs off the lead. Their

second attempt on the opposite side also ran the same gauntlet, but in the end two cygnets hatched. They didn't last long. I had observed them on the afternoon / evening of Friday 22nd of July and on Saturday they were gone- the parents searching for them forlornly all over the lake.

On December 12th I observed an unusual occurrence. Two drakes were fighting viciously, which in itself was not unusual but then three of the four resident cygnets got involved. Now nearly full grown, they took turns to attack one of the combatants, letting the other swim away to a safe distance. This went on for about three minutes with the cygnets leaping onto the drake and hitting it with their wings. Eventually the bird escaped but a short while later I saw it resume its fight with the other drake!

In late December, a member of the public informed me that he had observed swans fighting, and in the course of this, he saw one swim a considerable distance under water.



I get to see a few fish here and there- usually as I'm passing over the weed bed between buoys one and two (*see map above. Ed*). The water in 2005 has been remarkably clear, perhaps due to the massive growth of Nuttall's pondweed. At its thickest the bed stretched about 100 yards around no.4 buoy and in an average depth of eight feet of swimming water, the plant came to within a few inches of the surface. Richard Hardie and I spent two shifts clearing the main swimming lane in the days leading up to the Ashford Mile Swimming Race (July 18th) and two more on the weekend of the Sandwell show. We achieved this by using a steel rake attached to a rope at the rear of the rescue boat, much in the manner of eating noodles with a fork- twist it round and pull it up! It was effective and the swimmers able to follow a straight line between buoys 5 and 4 reported a clear channel. As the year progressed and the autumn

temperatures dropped, much of the weed bed became detached and drifted towards the jetty. In November I found the previously clear area round buoy number one to be thick with weed. This was clear when I swam a lap on December 31st but a massive amount of weed was seen to have gathered at the edge of the pool. A few of the regular fishermen remarked that landing fish in some areas had become easier.

I've seen three tench all about eighteen inches long at a depth of between four and eight feet in the weed between buoys 2 and 3. Some fishermen reported catching tench, but I did not personally see any caught. A shoal of tiny roach (identified by a swimmer who also fishes) was noted around the jetty and the slipways when there was no activity in July. A regular fisherman reported having caught a few average sized specimens. I saw 5 pike during the year including a specimen some two and a half feet long between buoys five and six. It came quickly up to me and then returned to the depths. I wondered at this, thinking that it must have been attracted by my hand movements before realising my true size! Ian Prosser later remarked that it was likely the glint of my wedding ring that attracted it.



Pike. Photo by Andy Purcell.

Large pike included one seen on a July morning at 7.40am in pursuit of a moorhen which, although distressed, managed to escape. It looked some three to four feet long and easily big enough to eat the bird. I speculated that the missing cygnets mentioned earlier may well have been taken in an attack such as this. A fisherman landed a fish of similar length on a Tuesday evening in August and I held it in my arms for his friend to take a picture with his camera phone. It was slender- not of large girth

Regular fisherman Andy seems to have had the best season - or so he told me. He has numerous photographs of large fish caught at Swan Pool and other locations. They included ones of Swan Pool carp that weighed in at 22, 26 and 31 lbs! This in contrast to others who regularly fish the pool and complain that there are no fish to be caught! A photograph of a similar large fish caught in Swan Pool appeared in a fishing magazine and

this inspired six or seven extra fishermen the following weekend. I didn't see any of them land a fish, although one chap reported having two pike slip off the hook before landing them (fish picture © Andrew Bloxham).



Review

Habitat Considerations for Parasitic Wasps (Hymenoptera)

By Mark. R. Shaw

Journal of Insect Conservation (2006) **10**: 117– 127

Mark Shaw is one of Britain's leading experts on the habits, biology and breeding characteristics of parasitic wasps. He has a wealth of knowledge in this field and in this paper reviews some of the problems associated with the study of the group and also their potential importance in current ecological evaluation of sites.

He notes features such as their specialisation (a particular wasp may be only able to breed from a single host species), their operation at a high trophic level (they are dependant on other insects high up in the food chain– oak tree– green tortrix caterpillar—parasitic wasp) and the great ignorance about the life histories and true identities of most species.

He argues that whilst the group may be difficult to study, it is emphatically necessary to encourage studies so that more can be discovered and the insects (*with probably over 6000 British species— Ed*) are not treated with disrespect and ignored when conservation issues are discussed. Many other insects have familiar appearance life histories, and distribution data attached to them. It can be conveniently easy to devise conservation programmes to suit them.

The potential vulnerability of the group for reasons given at the outset, makes their conservation on sites a concern . They are known to play a vital part in control of many insect pests from other orders and if their

extinctions on sites or on a larger scale take place, then the balance of other insect activity might well be altered with unexpected and maybe highly undesirable consequences.

Given the circumstances, Mark has a difficult job to champion such a group. Naturally he regards them as a vital integral part of the wildlife community on any site and using his long experience of sites he attempts to give some general guidelines with regard to factors that seem to make for 'good' parasitic wasp sites.

His findings **have a remarkable resonance for us in Birmingham and the Black Country**. I quote from his final paragraph:

'Trying to think of what fairly reliably constitutes this goodness in a site of a particular biotope, I can think of three habitat factors:

- 9 Reasonably large size
- 9 Continuity at whatever successional stage
- 9 For parasitoids of folivores (*those host insect larvae eating leaves.Ed*) its effective isolation from conventional arable or orchard agriculture.

It seems to me that this last is a crucial factor in habitat quality that we may be overlooking and it may help us to explain why brownfield sites (typically surrounded by buildings– not arable agriculture) and even suburban gardens rather paradoxically hold good populations of uncommon insects, sometimes including otherwise very elusive species of parasitoids.'

Editor



GASTERUPTION MINUTUM

Gasteruption minutum (drawn by the Editor) is probably having a long search for aculeate solitary bees or wasps so it can parasitize the larvae– or is it looking for something else ? There is so much to discover!

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



WITH WELL OVER 4000 HITS PLUS AN AWARD, YOUR SITE NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT ! MAKE CONTACT-SEE THE INFORMATION & ADD YOUR OWN INPUT .YOUR WILDLIFE WORK CAN BE THE SUBJECT OF A 'BLOG' SOMEWHERE !!

FIND: CLUB DETAILS– 2007 PROGRAMME, PUBLICATIONS– CURRENT LIST OF WILDFLOWERS, LINKS TO OTHER SITES 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!

Bulletin contributors were Matt Darby (nice photos) & the 'Earthquake', Mike Poulton, Paul Smith, Lee Copplesone & RSPB staff , Sarah Pullar, Margaret Shuker, Andy Purcell, Pete Shirley (the Sot's new pool photos are his also), and Tony Wood. The colour photo at the front is, as usual, the work of Andy Purcell and features the Fallow buck – the first time it has returned since the days of the deer park (some 100 years ago). Andy also contributes pictures of badger, muntjac & pike. Bill Moodie does his usual professional job on the fungi and we see the last of the beautifully presented Club accounts from Frances Hudson. There are some old botanical drawings from our earlier numbers. Who did what?