



*Sandnats*



BULLETIN OF THE SANDWELL NATURALISTS

ANNUAL REPORT

Vol. 45, No 1

April 2023

# Sandnats Bulletin



‘Morchella semilibera chained by nature to the ancient Priory wall’

## The Bulletin of the Sandwell Naturalists

### ANNUAL REPORT

**VOL. 45, No.1**

**April 2023**

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# **VOL. 45. No. 1 APRIL 2023**

Website at <http://sandnats.org.uk>

**Sandnats originated in 1975. Its members work to conserve wildlife in the Sandwell Valley, help others to enjoy it and assist the Country Park Staff in its management. We also take an active interest in nature conservation on neighbouring wildlife sites and liaise with allied associations such as the Wildlife Trusts.**

## **Committee (as at March 2023)**

**President:** Peter Shirley MBE.

**Chair:** Valerie Edkins.

**Secretary (archives):** Margaret Shuker.

**Minutes Secretary:** Gillian Barnard.

**Treasurer:** Sandra Wood.

**Fundraising Team Leader:** Chris Bird.

**Meetings/conservation Secretary:** Mike Poulton.

**Ordinary Members:** Richard Orton, Ann and Mike West.

## **Voluntary Posts**

**Membership Secretary:** Hazel Bloxham

**Newsletter:** Vacancy

**Bulletin Editor:** Mike Bloxham

**Website:** Clare Hinchliffe



*Photos: main cover 'ferns' and. inner cover 'fungus' by Mike Bloxham*

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## **Health and Safety**

'Sandnats' is fully insured, with renewal on an annual basis . Officers and leaders of outdoor activities are aware of risk assessment procedures and also of the need to update these in line with current practice. They are also have to abide by any regulations provided by local or national government with regard to the ongoing pandemics and other emergencies.

# The Accounts

## Statement of Income & Expenditure for Year to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022

<u>INCOME</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Membership & Visitors	-	-
Donations	40	20
Sundry Receipts		
Refreshments	-	2
Raffles	59    59	19
		21
Bank Interest	11	-
Publications	-	-
Back Copies of old publications	-	27
Bird Group	15	38
The John Shrimpton Bequest	1000	
Margaret's Garden Party	-	25
Fund Raising	211	133
Christmas Bug Hunt/Auction	-	-
	<u>1336</u>	<u>264</u>
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>		
Room Rental	150	80
Printing, Stationery & Postage	369	300
BTCV-Membership & Insurance	-	112
Wildlife Trust Subscription	30	30
Lecturers' fees & Donations	-	-
Holy Trinity School (Shrimpton Bequest)	400	-
Member's commemorative Event	103	-
Leaflets	100	-
Web Site	55	-
	<u>1207</u>	<u>522</u>
Excess of Income Over Expenditure for the Year	<u>129</u>	<u>(258)</u>

**BALANCE AS AT 31st DECEMBER 2021**

## REPRESENTED BY:

National Westminster Current Account	1880.22
--------------------------------------	---------

National Westminster Reserve Account	4861.44
--------------------------------------	---------

<b>ADD</b> Excess of Expenditure over income	128.74
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**£6,870.40**

**BALANCE AS AT 31st DECEMBER 2022**

## REPRESENTED BY:

National Westminster Current Account	1998.37
--------------------------------------	---------

National Westminster Reserve Account	4872.03
--------------------------------------	---------

**£6,870.40**

*I have prepared this statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31st December 2022 from books and records maintained, information supplied and explanations given and certify that it is in accordance therewith.*

**Mr John Adkinson**

*We again have to thank Sandra Wood for her meticulous work in maintaining and presenting our accounts during 2022. She has also spent much time in price comparisons with regard to commodities and in particular, has been regularly involved in discussion with our insurers to check that cover is appropriate to our needs. She has always been at the heart of our social events and with her husband Tony, continues to do wonderful work for Sandnats.*

Editor



## **fundraising**

The year saw Sandnats take part in four events. One of these at the 'Green Man' (Oak House) was for information only. The others, Handsworth in Bloom, Chasewater Charity Day and Streetly 'Ecofair' saw us take in £211. Two indoor event raffles raised an additional £40.

2022 saw Sandnats enter a new phase in its history. We have given prizes for school science in the distant past, but our latest venture saw the award of a £800 bursary to a local school (Holy Trinity Primary) for the advancement of wildlife studies on campus. This was possible thanks to the legacy of £1000 left to us by our late and much loved President John Shrimpton. If we are planning to continue with the bursaries, robust fundraising will continue to be necessary. Members will be aware of the importance of volunteering to help run stalls and promoting our activities in every way. We do hope that our new ventures will encourage both children and families to take an active interest in wildlife conservation, both at home and school and that they will also learn of the importance of the Sandwell Valley in this context.

Chris and Brenda Bird

## Editorial

2022 was somewhat turbulent as the Country strove to return to normality after three momentous years. Our Chair Val Edkins congratulates the committee and indeed the membership as a whole for staying with us and enabling us to regain much of our original level of activity. At the time of writing, I can anticipate a year of diverse and enjoyable wildlife activities ahead of us. Sadly a familiar scenario is before us. Time has played a familiar role in reducing the ability of loyal and industrious older members to perform at the levels they would wish. Sandra Wood still faithfully does her part as Treasurer but hopes someone else might like to take over (*is there anyone out there prepared to have a go.....?*).

Change is indeed always with us and does not necessarily play out in our favour. Until recently we had an excellent newsletter- widely read and put together in a most professional way by David and Judith King. They remain members, but have left the area to a new house in Droitwich and commitments there mean they have felt obliged to resign as editors of the Newsletter. *Could somebody have a go at producing a newsletter for us?* The Bulletin is filled with reports of wildlife studies carried out by members and friends and there is very little room in it for meeting reports and accounts of our social activities. It certainly cannot include updates of impending events.

Any review of the past months reveals notable achievements. We celebrated special birthdays of Tony Wood and Margaret Shuker in recognition of the fact that they have been members and indeed office holders for some 45 years. The committee still meets at Margaret's house, where the hospitality can lead to some meetings lasting for considerably longer than one would normally expect! Peter Shirley still completes his newsletter in The Birmingham Post, contributes regularly to social media on wildlife matters and has worked tirelessly with co- authors and members of the British Plant Gall Society to produce the third edition of 'British Plant Galls' – some 450 pages in length and due for publication by the Field Studies Council in 2023.

We are all aware of another magnificent achievement by Mike Poulton, Prof. Ian Trueman and friends, as their adventures over hundreds of hectares in Sutton Park have culminated in publication of 'The Flora of Sutton Park'. Jenni Wilding is enjoying her time with the RSPB as she becomes steadily more involved in working with the organisation and nurturing new initiatives. She has regularly exhibited at events involving Dipterist's Forum and Staffordshire University's Invertebrate Fair. Richard Orton is central to the moth recording efforts on a number of sites in Birmingham and the Black Country as well as acting as a mentor and local leader in freshwater studies. He has been leading our own freshwater surveys in the Valley and you will all be seeing the first of the report series in the shape of the 'Dragonflies of the Sandwell Valley' later this year.



This number will continue on a celebratory theme as we enjoy the usual bird report which contains a remarkable moment in the life of Pete Hackett, an outstanding regional ornithologist who has been recording avidly here since his early mentors Bob and Liz Normand departed for Devon. However, we do have to give pride of place to record the work of our own Tony Wood. Supported by Sandra, he has produced a remarkably complete report on the moths coming to a light trap in his garden over time. It is virtually certain that this entomological epic has not been bettered in Wednesbury (or maybe anywhere in Sandwell). Richard will give his impressions and you will see the fascinating results.



## Delight or Decline?

**Peter Shirley (President)**

Another year, another clutch of doom and gloom stories highlighting the pressures and losses wildlife faces, but also another set of good news stories to cheer us up. The major nature conservation organisations do like to keep coming up with figures demonstrating the reductions in range and abundance of many species. If you dig around a bit though you will find that more positive things are happening.

Take Butterfly Conservation as an example. Their report *The State of the UK's Butterflies 2022* (the last such report was in 2015) states that “This report is yet more compelling evidence of nature’s decline in the UK. On average, UK butterflies have lost 6% of their total abundance at monitored sites and 42% of their distribution over the period 1976-2019.” They also say though: “Despite the gloomy picture painted by the long-term trends, numerous examples show that targeted species conservation action can turn around the fortunes of threatened butterflies at site, landscape and

national levels. However, the resources currently available for such work are woefully inadequate to address the scale of the task.”

Other species demonstrate the good news / bad news syndrome. Take mammals: according to the latest Red Data report 11 out of our 47 species, including water voles and hedgehogs, are in imminent danger. On the plus side beaver re-introductions seem to be succeeding, otters are now widespread, and on occasion are turning up in city centres, after nearly becoming extinct 50 or so years ago. Their polecat cousins continue to spread eastwards across the country, and badgers are increasing and expanding their ranges, being common in many suburban areas, not least here in and around the Sandwell Valley and in places such as Harborne. Surely fluctuating populations rather than stability are the natural order of things? We only have 150 years or so of data to use for reference: what was happening 500, 1,000 or 2,000 years ago?

Birds show the same patterns. Human activities have a great bearing on the status of individual species. Changes in farming and forestry practices lead to changes in habitats and food supplies. Our parks and gardens can help or hinder species and the degree to which they do so changes with fashions. For example Blue and Great Tit populations are much higher than they would naturally be because of our passion for feeding them. In recent decades raptors, including Buzzard, Red Kite and Peregrine have increased in number, although Kestrels seemed to have declined. Egrets are now widespread and common in England, parakeets screech around local skies, and Ravens now seem to be resident here. Often the success of one species spells trouble for others. Thus it is with various gulls and ground-nesting waders, the latter also falling prey to foxes and badgers.

That's the trouble with nature, it does what it does rather than what we want or think it ought to do. It is random and chaotic, not ordered and predictable.

To return to insects, I came across some staggering statistics recently in the Royal Entomological Society's magazine *Antennae*. It carried an article about insect migration, a natural phenomenon of which most people are unaware. Perhaps the best known example is the painted lady butterfly. In some years millions of these arrive here from Africa and Asia. They breed as they journey, and six generations may be needed to complete the round trip to and from the UK. Each generation can fly up to 4,000 km, about the distance from the Birmingham to the North Pole. In relation to body size these are the world's longest migrations. It is just one species contributing to the estimated 3.2 trillion insects, weighing over 3,000 tonnes, that pass over central southern England every year. The main times for take-off are dawn and dusk, when the insects seek out the warmest and fastest layers of air, often moving at around 50 km/h. Five hundred million hoverflies are estimated to arrive here every year, and two billion are estimated to leave in the autumn. Insects may be declining in the so-called insect Armageddon, but for some of them there still seems to be plenty to go round.

At least the voluntary sector is raising and applying resources to scientifically endorsed activities and projects to help conserve species and habitats. The Government and its

agencies continue to prevaricate and hide behind the language of Whitehall mandarins, so brilliantly portrayed by the Sir Humphrey character in *Yes Prime Minister*. Take the recently announced Environment Improvement Plan (EIP), billed as the ‘*First revision of the 25 year Environment Plan*’, which covers nature conservation, water and air quality, and waste treatment and disposal. It promises 500k hectares of new habitats, 25 new or expanded National Nature Reserves, thousands of hectares of new woodland, and up to 80% of farmers adopting nature-friendly practices. Welcome as this may be, it seems to be a wish-list which merely re-hashes previous commitments. The Office of Environmental Protection recently said that the Government is failing, or making no progress, on almost every measure of the previous plan. The EIP could have addressed this by setting out how the objectives will be achieved, but it fails to do so.

There are two big weaknesses in the Government’s position. Firstly, it is not clear how much money will be needed, or where it will come from (although the Wildlife Trust’s Chief Executive Craig Bennett says that funding for nature is 10% less than ten years ago, and the need now is for £1.2B extra annually). Secondly, in an Alice-in-Wonderland situation, a bill is making its way through Parliament to remove hundreds of laws and regulations, originating in the EU, which protect nature and the environment. If passed, these protections will be lost before adequate replacements can be enacted, thus making it harder, if not impossible, to achieve the EIP’s ambitions and aspirations.

Internationally, the year saw the adoption by many countries of a new Global Biodiversity Framework at COP 15 held in Montreal last December. According to Richard Benwell, head of Wildlife and Countryside Link, “The UK Government did sterling diplomatic work in securing global ambition.” Maybe a classic case of “Do what I say, not what I do”. As the first such international initiative was agreed in the early 90s at the famous Rio conference, and according to the doomsters things have consistently worsened since then, I am not holding my breath for this one.

In a masterpiece of twisted logic, in the Foreword to the EIP Rishi Sunak says: “The Government is committed to leaving the environment in a better state than we found it. We have made huge progress and we are going further and faster now that control of environment policy has returned to the UK.”

So, that’s all right then.

Peter Shirley

10/03/23



## RSPB Sandwell Valley 2022

The highlight of 2022 was the range of visiting waders. The star being a White-tailed Lapwing visiting the reserve for a day. Other species of note include Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Black- tailed Godwit and Greenshank. A Green Sandpiper was present for an extended period early in the year.

A pair of Oystercatchers fledged one chick in 2022. Six pairs of Lapwing nested on the islands. We trialled using upright garden canes on one island in an effort to disrupt avian predator attack flights. It was reassuring to see Lapwing still nest on this island amongst the canes and two young were reared to fledging age which is a better result than the previous year where no young fledged. This year we are continuing with the use of garden canes, and in addition have an area of wet grassland protected from fox disturbance by electric fencing, to give the breeding Lapwing further support.

The scrub bordering the nature reserve and main visitor path had formed a uniform dense canopy with no understory. With council permission we have cleared two glades, seeding them with woodland wildflowers. Diversifying the age of the scrub habitat is ongoing, to improve this habitat for finches, warblers, butterflies and other species.



Once again swifts nested in the special bricks nest holes in the visitor centre building. 2 bricks were used. To celebrate this special species at the nature reserve, children from local Hamstead Junior school worked with local artists to create an artwork of swooping swift shapes that have been added to the building.

Brumbats surveyed our bat boxes and discovered a possible juvenile brown long eared bat – the first recording of this species at the nature reserve if it is confirmed.

Cathy Taylor (Site Manager)

# Bird Group Records from 2022

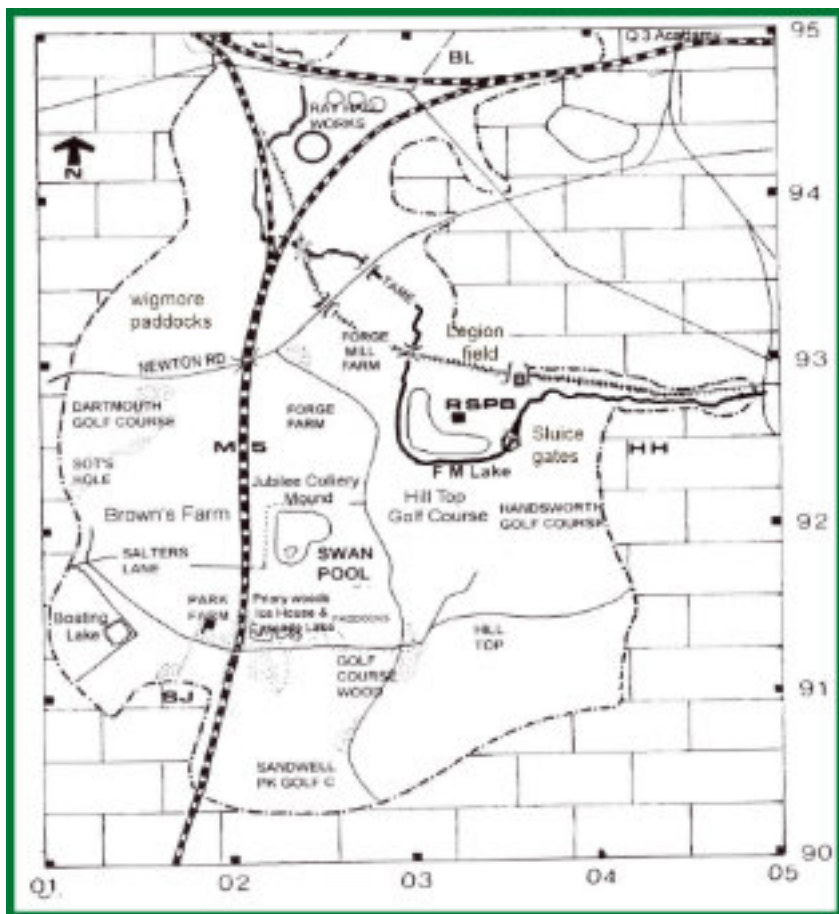
We are again indebted to our special team of birders who have contributed to our reports on a regular basis. Dave Saunders compiles the records and sends them in, while Mike and Anne West with Pete Hackett, enjoy reviewing them and providing a commentary on the most significant aspects of the findings. Cathy Taylor and the team at the RSPB Reserve have made important ongoing contributions to our studies and several birders have contributed the great photographs we have included.

The basic team is given below:

:Richard Baker, Roger Burns, John Clarke, Mark Dickinson, Mathew Fletcher, Pete Forbes, Vicky Gurney, Pete Hackett, Oliver Hague, Matt Hadlington, Steve Hextell, Tim Hextell, Clive Higgins, Mike Ixer, Hughie King, Catherine Knowles, Steve Lilly, Gareth Marlow, Mike Nicklin, Eric Norman, Rob Preston, Craig Reed, Steve Roper, Dave Saunders, Tracy Saunders, Pam Thompson, Dave Waite and Craig Whitelaw.

The presentation of records has been changed a little in this edition in that we have included a table of site names and grid references so readers can locate observations with greater precision. The map is a rather imprecise by itself. Grid Reference Finder (<https://gridreferencefinder.com>) can be a useful tool for you to see the subsite you want in detail. It is not possible to locate all the sites named by the birders because vernacular names can vary !! We have also grouped the names of birds appearing in each month at the head of each record set for quick reference purposes.

Bluebell Wood	SP017926	North Island	SP029928
Brown's Farm	SP016921	Oxbow Lake	SP032923
Bund	SP034925	Park Farm Wood	SP019913
Cableway bridge Paddock	SP022916	Power Line Ride	SP028912
Crematorium	SP023931	Priory wood central & lakes	SP022914
Dartmouth Park	SP015913	Priory Woods East	SP025914
Europa Paddock & Wood	SP018911	Railway Field (Hill 60)	SP031929
Forge Farm	SP023926	Ray Hall Works	SP024944
Forge Farm M5 fields	SP023926	RSPB Centre	SP034928
Forge Mill Farm	SP028928	RSPB conservation grasslands	SP033928
Forge Mill Farm Crop Field	SP027930	RSPB Frontage field (South)	SP034927
Forge Mill Farm Tame Field	SP027934	RSPB Hide	SP033925
Forge Mill Lake	SP030925	RSPB Marsh	SP034926
Forge Mill Lake slipway	SP029926	RSPB Marsh carr woodland	SP035926
Hamstead Railway Field	SP037930	Rushall Canal Junction	SP030947
Handsworth Golf Course Pool	SP038920	Salters Lane	SP016919
High Bridges	SP035940	Sandwell mini golf (Lodge Hill)	SP016916
HillTop area	SP034913	Sot's Hole	SP012923
Hilltop Golf Course (Cycle trail)	SP030922	Sot's Hole Paddocks	SP017925
Ice house Lake	SP022913	Swan Pool	SP024920
Jubilee (Coal Tip) mound & wood	SP025923	Swan Pool Meadow	SP026918
King George's Field (Lodge Hill)	SP014916	Tame corridor area (Hamstead)	SP043927
Legion Field	SP034928	Tame Workings/new sluices	SP037928
Newton Road Paddocks	SP019932	The Paddocks	SP026915



## January

Birds featured:

**Blackcap, Cetti's Warbler, Common Gull, Dunlin, Fieldfare, Green Sandpiper, Greylag Goose, Meadow Pipit, Oystercatcher, Peregrine, Raven, Red Kite, Redpoll, Redwing, Tawny Owl and Yellow-legged Gull.**

A Green Sandpiper on the River Tame by the dam provided a good start to the month. A Cetti's Warbler was at the Sandwell Valley Reserve and the 2<sup>nd</sup> winter Yellow-legged Gull was at Swan Pool. On January 2<sup>nd</sup> a Dunlin was seen at the island, a Peregrine was on the pylons in Monk's Meadow and a Greylag Goose was noted. An Oystercatcher was seen at Forge Mill and Ravens were over Hill Top and Monk's Meadow on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, an adult Yellow-legged Gull and two Common Gull were at Forge Mill, one

of the latter being the Oslo ringed bird. The 6<sup>th</sup> saw a first winter Yellow-legged Gull on Swan Pool and the first Fieldfares of the year, with two birds at Salter's Lane and one near Swan Pool. On the 9<sup>th</sup> a Peregrine was observed on the pylons again. A male Blackcap was at the feeding station on the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> saw an Adult Yellow-legged Gull and two Greylag Geese in Dartmouth Park, a small movement of Redwing and Fieldfare across the Valley also being noted.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> the Second Winter Yellow-legged Gull was at Swan Pool and the next day there were three Oystercatcher at Forge Mill. On the 15<sup>th</sup> a single Redpoll was near Forge Mill and the Green Sandpiper was still present. On the 20<sup>th</sup> a Tawny Owl was at Park Farm wood, with an Adult Yellow-legged Gull at Forge Mill. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> a Tawny Owl and male Blackcap were at High Bridges. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> was our first Meadow Pipit, with one flushed at Hill Top and the Second Winter Yellow-legged Gull was at Swan Pool. The 27<sup>th</sup> saw a Second Winter Yellow-legged Gull at Swan Pool, Green Sandpiper still on the river and a Raven in flight over Forge Mill. On the 29<sup>th</sup> we noted another Meadow Pipit, with one in Swan Pool meadow and on the last day of the month, a Red Kite flew over Salter's Lane and an Oystercatcher was at Dartmouth Park.

## **February**

Birds featured:

**Barnacle Goose, Brambling, Common Gull, Curlew, Egyptian Goose, Greylag Goose, Jack Snipe, Linnet, Meadow Pipit, Oystercatcher, Peregrine, Pheasant, Raven, Red Kite, Redpoll, Skylark, Snipe (Common) and Yellow-legged Gull.**

A very poor start to the month saw one of the worst Snipe counts on record, with only four Common and four Jack Snipe noted (a Pheasant was also spotted on Handsworth golf course). On the 2<sup>nd</sup> we saw the Barnacles return after an absence of twenty one days, the 3<sup>rd</sup> providing a third calendar year Yellow-legged Gull on Swan Pool, whilst on the 4<sup>th</sup> there were a couple of Redpoll at the Centre feeders - scarce this winter. On the 5<sup>th</sup> we saw five Ravens over Hill Top, with two Greylag Geese appearing at Dartmouth Park on the next day. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, we noted a Common Gull at Forge Mill and a Peregrine pair displaying over the new workings. The 8<sup>th</sup> saw 13 Greylag flying over Forge Mill - our third largest flock on record.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> an Egyptian Goose was briefly at Forge Mill, the first record since 2013 and the first Skylark of the year was over the King George playing fields. On the 10<sup>th</sup> we saw another Skylark, this time over Salter's Lane and a Pheasant was flushed on the Forge Mill Farm trail. On the 11<sup>th</sup> we witnessed a 3<sup>rd</sup> calendar year Yellow-legged Gull again on Swan Pool, whilst on the 12<sup>th</sup>, six Oystercatchers were in the Valley. On the 14<sup>th</sup> a Brambling was sighted in Dartmouth Park and 35 Linnets were at the new workings. On the 16<sup>th</sup> there was a Red Kite over the M5 and on the 17<sup>th</sup> a single Meadow Pipit was seen at Hill Top. We were delighted when on the 18<sup>th</sup> we saw a Skylark singing over Swan Pool meadow and on the 20<sup>th</sup> a Curlew flew over High Bridges, with two Common Gulls being at Forge Mill, one again being the Oslo ringed bird. On the 21<sup>st</sup> an adult Yellow-legged Gull was at Swan Pool. The next day saw five Meadow Pipit in Tanhouse meadow as well as Jack Snipe being noticed on the Bund. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the 3<sup>rd</sup> calendar year Yellow-legged Gull was at Swan Pool, the 25<sup>th</sup> providing a 2<sup>nd</sup> winter Common Gull on Swan Pool. Finally, on the 26<sup>th</sup>, a Skylark flew over the Reserve.





*Top left: Black-headed Gull attacking Common Tern (Matthew Fletcher).  
 Top right: Ruff (William Gray). Lower left: Great White Egret (Hughie King).  
 Lower right: Kittiwake (Matthew Fletcher)*

## **March**

Birds featured:

**Blackcap, Brambling, Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff, Common Gull, Curlew, Dunlin, Linnet, Little Ringed Plover, Marsh Harrier, Raven, Red-legged Partridge, Red Kite, Sand Martin, Shelduck, Stonechat, Swallow, Willow Warbler, Wheatear, Woodcock, Yellowhammer, Yellow-legged Gull.**

The first day of the month provided a record of a Common Gull on Swan Pool. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> a Chiffchaff was singing near Monk's meadow, becoming the first migrant of the year and the Oslo-ringed Common Gull was on Forge Mill. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> we saw two Shelduck on Swan Pool and a female Stonechat at Salter's Lane. On the following day a male Stonechat was opposite Forge Mill car park, a male and two females being in the Pole field at Salter's Lane. On the 5<sup>th</sup> three Stonechat were present in the Pole field and a male Yellowhammer was seen briefly, the 3<sup>rd</sup> calendar-year Yellow-legged Gull



being noted on Swan Pool. On the 6<sup>th</sup> three female Stonechat were seen at Salter's Lane whilst on the 7<sup>th</sup>, a Common Gull was at Swan Pool. On the 8<sup>th</sup> a male Marsh Harrier flew over Salter's Lane. A Curlew was seen calling over the golf course on the 9<sup>th</sup>, later being seen on the island at Forge Mill and there was evidence that the Raven was nesting. On the 10<sup>th</sup> a Woodcock was near the old priory and the 3<sup>rd</sup> calendar-year Yellow-legged Gull was at Forge Mill. The 11<sup>th</sup> provided a Red Kite sighting near Ray Hall and later it was over High Bridges.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> a Little Ringed Plover was at the Reserve with two present the following day. On the 15<sup>th</sup> we saw two Sand Martin at Swan Pool and a female Wheatear was at Salter's Lane on the next day. On the 17<sup>th</sup> a male Brambling was recorded under the feeders, a male Wheatear being noted at Salter's Lane, both being present next day. On the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> the Brambling was still present, with two Little Ringed Plover, a Red Kite over the Crematorium and a Curlew at the same location in the evening. The 22<sup>nd</sup> witnessed the first migrant Blackcap at Salter's Lane, 50+ Linnet near the Crematorium and a male Brambling at Forge Mill Farm. The 24<sup>th</sup> provided us with our second Dunlin of the year, with the first returning Willow Warbler in the Marsh on the following day and four Cetti's Warbler singing around Forge Mill. On the 26<sup>th</sup> we saw a Red-legged Partridge near Newton Road and a Common Gull on Swan Pool. The following day witnessed five Little Ringed Plovers appearing at Forge Mill, the same location providing us with a single Sand Martin in flight on March 29<sup>th</sup>. On the following day we recorded both the first Swallow of the year at Forge Mill and a male Stonechat at Salter's Lane which was still present at the month's end.

## **April**

Birds featured:

**Brambling, Common Sandpiper, Cuckoo, Garden Warbler, Garganey, Grasshopper Warbler, Green Sandpiper, Greenland Wheatear, Greylag Goose, House Martin, Lesser Whitethroat, Long-eared Owl, Oystercatcher, Peregrine, Pheasant, Redstart, Reed Warbler, Ring Ouzel, Sedge Warbler, Snipe (Common), Stonechat, Wheatear, Whitethroat and Yellow Wagtail.**

April started with the Stonechat at Salter's Lane and still present the following day. On the 4<sup>th</sup> we saw male and female Wheatear at Salter's Lane. On the 7<sup>th</sup> a Peregrine was over Forge Mill and on the 9<sup>th</sup> a female Brambling was under the Centre feeders. On the 10<sup>th</sup> we saw an Oystercatcher sitting on eggs. The 11<sup>th</sup> provided a record of Yellow Wagtail flying over Watery Lane paddocks, this also being our 100<sup>th</sup> species for the year. Additionally, three House Martins were over Swan Pool, being the first of the year for the bird. On the 12<sup>th</sup> two Common Sandpipers, Green Sandpiper and a female Wheatear were on the islands at Forge Mill and the first substantial number of hirundines was noted, with 50+ on Swan Pool. On the 13<sup>th</sup> we sighted a Sedge Warbler in the Marsh, the 14<sup>th</sup> providing records of two male and a female Garganey at Swan Pool, later moving on to Forge Mill and the Marsh. The same day provided sightings of Wheatear, Yellow Wagtail and Whitethroat at Salter's Lane and a Reed Warbler at Forge Mill.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> a Cuckoo flew over the M5 from Salter's Lane and on the 16<sup>th</sup> we flushed a Pheasant at Salter's Lane. On the 18<sup>th</sup> a Common Sandpiper was at Swan Pool, whilst on the 19<sup>th</sup> a pair of Ring Ouzel was sighted at Salter's Lane as well as a Long-eared Owl which was seen briefly in flight in the Marsh. On the 21<sup>st</sup> a Garden Warbler was near Swan Pool and a Snipe was near the hide.

We noted that on the 24<sup>th</sup>, Greylags in Dartmouth Park had two young. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Grasshopper Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat were at Swan Pool, with the 26<sup>th</sup> providing records of two Greenland-type Wheatear at Salter's Lane, male and female Redstart and Grasshopper Warbler on Brown's Farm. On the 27<sup>th</sup> a female Ring Ouzel flew low over Brown's Farm in the direction of Newton Road. The 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> provided a reeling Grasshopper Warbler in the Marsh, whilst on the last day of the month, two Common Sandpiper were at Forge Mill and a female Redstart was sighted in Flycatcher field.

## **May**

### **Birds featured:**

**Arctic Tern, Common Tern, Cuckoo, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Grasshopper Warbler, Hobby, Lesser Whitethroat, Mandarin Duck, Redstart, Ring Ouzel, Ringed Plover, Ruddy Shelduck, Sanderling, Shelduck, Spotted Flycatcher, Swift, Wheatear, Whinchat, Wood Sandpiper and Yellow Wagtail.**

The Grasshopper Warbler remained in the Marsh and the first Swift of the year was over Forge Mill. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> a pair of Whinchat were at the Marsh and a Dunlin visited - sighted briefly passing through at Forge Mill. The 3<sup>rd</sup> produced a Cuckoo calling near Swan Pool and two Wheatears at Salter's Lane. On the 4<sup>th</sup> we recorded a Cuckoo again, this time on the former Hill Top Golf Course and Yellow Wagtail was at the islands. This day also saw two Redstarts at the paddocks and two Wheatear at Hill Top.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> a Whinchat was on the fence line at Swan Pool meadow and a male Ring Ouzel was seen at Brown's Farm. A Spotted Flycatcher was at Hill Top on the 6<sup>th</sup> (spring birds are now rare in the valley). The 7<sup>th</sup> saw the 'All Day Bird Race' and an impressive 89 species were logged, main highlights being Hobby, Redstart, Cuckoo, Yellow Wagtail, four Wheatear, two Grasshopper Warbler, Whinchat and Mandarin.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> a tern species was over Swan Pool car park and a Common Tern was over Swan Pool. The 10<sup>th</sup> produced Wheatear, Yellow Wagtail, two Whinchats at Salter's Lane and a Hobby over the new workings. The 11<sup>th</sup> was a good day for passage with three Dunlin, three Ringed Plover, a Hobby at Forge Mill and Arctic Tern at Swan Pool. On the 12<sup>th</sup> we recorded three Ringed Plover, Dunlin (all day), Wood Sandpiper (briefly) and heard a Golden Plover.

The next day two Ringed Plover were still present and a Mandarin was at the islands. The 14<sup>th</sup> saw another brief sighting of a Wood Sandpiper at Forge Mill, Yellow Wagtail near Monk's meadow and Spotted Flycatcher at Swan Pool paddocks. On the 15<sup>th</sup> a

Cuckoo was calling - first on the former golf course and later from the Marsh. In addition a Hobby was sighted over the new workings.

The 17<sup>th</sup> provided a record of a Cuckoo calling and showing well in the Marsh, with another singing record on the next day near Swan Pool paddocks - a Hobby was also reported. The 19<sup>th</sup> noted Cuckoo again, this time on the former golf course. The 21<sup>st</sup> saw a Yellow Wagtail at Forge Mill and a Dunlin was also reported. On the next day a Ringed Plover was present at Forge Mill, remaining for the next two days.



Upper left: Gargany (Craig Whitelaw) . Upper right: Redstart (Oliver Hague).  
Lower left: Mandarin. Lower right : Red-crested Pochard (both by Hughie King).

Two Hobby were noted at Forge Mill on May 24<sup>th</sup>, one also being sighted over the Reserve on the next day. On May 27<sup>th</sup> we recorded Common Tern at Swan Pool, with the 29<sup>th</sup> yielding records of Shelduck and Ringed Plover on islands at Forge Mill.

The following day provided a Ruddy Shelduck sighting. Finally, on the 31<sup>st</sup> we noted a Sanderling in Dartmouth Park, with Grasshopper Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Hobby seen at the Reserve.

## June

### **Birds featured:**

**Common Sandpiper, Curlew, Great Black -backed Gull, Hobby, Peregrine, Pochard, Raven, Red Kite, Teal, **White-tailed Lapwing**, Willow Tit and Yellow-legged Gull.**

What a start to the month! On June 1<sup>st</sup> A White -tailed Lapwing was reported to be at the Marsh by Pete Hackett. This was not only a new bird for the Valley, but new for the county - with only seven previous records for the UK. This was a well - deserved find for Pete and a just reward for all the hours he has spent birding and recording in the Valley.



The 4<sup>th</sup> saw Hobby over the Reserve and a Curlew was heard, On the 5<sup>th</sup> a Greater Black - backed Gull was on the Raft at Forge Mill for ten minutes. A Red Kite was over Forge Mill on the 7<sup>th</sup> and the following day we recorded our first returning Pochard at Forge Mill. We noted a Hobby over the Reserve on the 10<sup>th</sup> and the following day, a Yellow- legged Gull was at Forge Mill.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> a Red Kite was over the Centre and on June 21<sup>st</sup> a possible Willow Tit was seen and heard at the Feeding Station. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we recorded our first returning Common Sandpiper, four Ravens also being noted in flight. A Peregrine was seen over the Centre on June 28<sup>th</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup> (the penultimate day of the month) saw our first returning Teal, with a pair at Forge Mill.

## July

### **Birds featured:**

**Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Cuckoo, Green Sandpiper, Hobby, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Little Ringed Plover, Peregrine, Red Kite, Redshank, Snipe (Common), Water Rail, Wheatear and Yellowhammer.**

There was a female Wheatear in Dartmouth Park on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> a Black-tailed Godwit was seen on the island briefly and next day, a Peregrine was chasing a Lesser Black-backed Gull over Hill Top. On the 6<sup>th</sup> two Common Sandpiper were seen and a female Yellowhammer on the Reserve, whilst on the 7<sup>th</sup> a Cuckoo flew over the island from the Marsh and the second Black-tailed Godwit of the month was found at the Bund. On the 9<sup>th</sup> three Black-tailed Godwits were seen with three Common Sandpiper on the Reserve. On the 14<sup>th</sup> the first returning Snipe and a Hobby flew over the Centre, while the 15<sup>th</sup> marked the arrival of a Redshank, staying until the 20<sup>th</sup>. On the 16<sup>th</sup> a Water Rail was calling near the sluice and a Hobby flew over Forge Mill. July 17<sup>th</sup> recorded five Little Ringed Plovers and the following day a Red Kite was seen overflying. On the 19<sup>th</sup> around six Little Ringed Plover and a Common Sandpiper were recorded. July 22<sup>nd</sup> noted a Black-tailed Godwit pausing briefly on the island and another Red Kite flew over Salter's Lane. On the 24<sup>th</sup> a Green Sandpiper was briefly on the island and later near the dam. Finally, on the 27<sup>th</sup> a Red Kite was noticed near Ray Hall.

## August

### **Birds featured:**

**Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Grasshopper Warbler, Great White Egret, Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, Hobby, Little Ringed Plover, Marsh Harrier, Raven, Red Kite, Redstart, Snipe (Common), Spotted Flycatcher, Swift, Tree Pipit, Water Rail, Wheatear, Whinchat, Willow Warbler and Yellow Wagtail.**

The first few days were uneventful with only Water Rail in the Marsh and Snipe on the Bund. On the 5<sup>th</sup> a male Wheatear was seen at Salter's Lane, on the 6<sup>th</sup> a Green Sandpiper in the Marsh, whilst on the 7<sup>th</sup> a female Wheatear was at Salter's Lane, two Spotted Flycatchers were near the Hump Back Bridge and a Red Kite was over High Bridges. On the 8<sup>th</sup> six Raven were at Hill Top golf course and on the 14<sup>th</sup>, Little Ringed Plover and Green Sandpiper were at Forge Mill. We also noted Common Sandpiper in Dartmouth Park and eight Swift. On the 15<sup>th</sup> a Spotted Flycatcher was at Salter's Lane and the next day Hobby was recorded at the same site, Common Sandpiper was recorded on the Tame, 15+ Willow Warbler were at Hill Top and a Spotted Flycatcher was near Swan Pool.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> Wheatear was seen at Swan Pool meadow and Salter's Lane, together with three Whinchats. The next day at the last named site, three Wheatears were noted, with at least one Whinchat and three Spotted Flycatchers also recorded. Birding continued to be rewarding here, with the 19<sup>th</sup> providing Redstart, Wheatear and Yellow Wagtail

records. The following day Spotted Flycatcher was again at Salter's Lane, together with two Redstart male and a female. A visit to Hill Top on the same day rewarded us with Spotted Flycatcher. On the 21<sup>st</sup> four Spotted Flycatchers were at Hill Top and on the following day we recorded three Wheatears – one near Park Farm and two at Salter's Lane with a male Redstart also present at the latter. We proceeded to Swan Pool paddocks only to find five Spotted Flycatchers and a further two at Hill Top!

Salter's Lane continued to be interesting with August 23<sup>rd</sup> providing records of a Wheatear, Yellow Wagtail, Whinchat and Hobby. The next day the same site was hosting a pair of Wheatear, five more birds also having been seen in the Valley. Also reported were Spotted Flycatcher and Common Sandpiper - two at Dartmouth Park and one at Forge Mill. On the 25<sup>th</sup> a female Redstart was at the boathouse (Swan Pool) and a pair of Wheatear, a Whinchat and female Redstart rewarded another visit to Salter's Lane. On the same day Red Kite, Marsh Harrier and Grasshopper Warbler had been present at the Reserve.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> Great White Egret was seen at the Reserve, Redstart at Tanhouse Meadow, with Redstart, two Wheatear and two Spotted Flycatcher at Salter's Lane, one in Priory Wood and two seen in the paddock by the hump-backed bridge. Further observations found 6+ Spotted Flycatchers and a single Whinchat at Hill Top where a Hobby was also seen.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> a Great White Egret was still at the Reserve. Our return to Salter's Lane provided six Yellow Wagtails, a Hobby, Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart. A Wheatear was at Swan Pool meadow and at Hill Top were Spotted Flycatchers (at least 12 birds), four Yellow Wagtail, Wheatear and Tree Pipit. August 28<sup>th</sup> rewarded us with Red Kite over Forge Mill, with Wheatear and Yellow Wagtail at Salter's Lane. The following day on the same site saw a male Wheatear. On the 30<sup>th</sup> we noted four Spotted Flycatcher at Salter's Lane and a Black-tailed Godwit put in an appearance, with 3 reported at Swan Pool. Finally on the 31<sup>st</sup>, our Salter's Lane visits for the month concluded when we recorded three Whinchat and Spotted Flycatcher. A Greenshank had also paid a brief visit to the Reserve.

## **September**

### **Birds featured:**

**Barn Owl, Common Tern, Coot, Green Sandpiper, Hobby, Jack Snipe, Lesser Whitethroat, Mandarin Duck, Osprey, Peregrine, Red Kite, Redstart, Redwing, Ruff, Short-eared Owl, Spotted Flycatcher, Spotted Redshank, Stonechat, Tree Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat and Wigeon.**

The month started with a Spotted Flycatcher at Salter's Lane and three Whinchats near Swan Pool. The 3<sup>rd</sup> was the 'All Day Bird Race' and we clocked up 83 species the highlights being Hobby, two Wheatears, two Whinchat, two Spotted Flycatcher, two Redstart, two Tree Pipit, two Lesser Whitethroat and a Green Sandpiper. On the 4<sup>th</sup> a Hobby was seen over Forge Mill, a male Redstart still being at Salter's Lane on the 5<sup>th</sup> with a Common Tern at Forge Mill also noted. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, Spotted Flycatcher, two

Whinchats and the male Redstart (present for its fourth day) were at Salters' Lane and a Whinchat was on the island at Forge Mill. On the 7<sup>th</sup> a Hobby was seen over the Legion Field and two Spotted Flycatchers were near the old Priory. On the 8<sup>th</sup> the first returning Wigeon was recorded. A male Mandarin appeared on the 10<sup>th</sup> at Ice House Lake and Red Kite was seen over the M5. On the 11<sup>th</sup> a Short-eared Owl and Hobby were observed over the Reserve, with a female Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher near Forge Hill. On September 13<sup>th</sup> there were records of Whinchat, Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher at Hill Top, Whinchat at Salter's Lane and Green Sandpiper and Ruff on the Reserve.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> the Ruff was still present (it was at the Reserve until the 19<sup>th</sup>). On the 15<sup>th</sup> three Stonechats were at the Marsh with Whinchat and Redstart. On the 16<sup>th</sup> a pair of Stonechat were at Salter's Lane and a Hobby was over Forge Mill, the 19<sup>th</sup> seeing a Wheatear at Salter's Lane.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> Tree Pipit and Stonechat at were at Salter's Lane and a pair of Stonechat was at the Marsh. On the 21<sup>st</sup> a juvenile Spotted Redshank was seen briefly visit the island - only the fifth record for the Valley! The same day saw three Stonechats at the Marsh and a Hobby over Forge Mill. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> a Stonechat was still at the Marsh and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Whinchat and two Stonechats were seen at Salter's Lane.



*Stonechat (Richard Baker)*  
*One of the birds of the year*

*Greylag Goose (Matthew Fletcher)*  
*Beautiful portrait of the two birds.*

September 24<sup>th</sup> provided sightings of four Stonechats at Salter's Lane, one in the Marsh and a Whinchat at Hill Top. On the 25<sup>th</sup> a Barn Owl was observed at Hill Top and a Peregrine was over Forge Mill. On the 26<sup>th</sup> the first returning Redwings were seen with five over the Marsh. The 27<sup>th</sup> witnessed a pair of Stonechat was at Salter's Lane, a pair at Swan Pool meadow and a new record count for Coot was established, with 526 across the Valley. An Osprey was seen heading south-west over Salter's Lane on the 28<sup>th</sup> and Jack Snipe were recorded as present on the Reserve. On the 29<sup>th</sup> a Stonechat pair was noted and a female Whinchat was by the hide. On the last day of the month a Hobby was seen at Hill Top.

## October

### **Birds featured (The month of the Stonechat):**

**Brambling, Brent Goose, Common Gull, Dunlin, Hobby, Jack Snipe, Mandarin Duck, Oystercatcher, Peregrine, (Radde's Warbler), Ring Ouzel, Short-eared Owl, Snipe (Common), Stonechat, Wheatear and Yellowhammer.**

Five Stonechats at Salter's Lane on October 1<sup>st</sup> heralded a good month for this species, with a Jack Snipe on the Reserve and a Hobby over the WBA ground adjoining the Valley. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> five Stonechats were still present and a female Yellowhammer at Salter's Lane, three Stonechat in the Marsh and a pair near the Crematorium. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> we noted at least two Stonechats at the Marsh and a Jack Snipe on the island. On the 4<sup>th</sup> four Stonechats were seen at Salter's Lane and two at Swan Pool. On the following day a pair of Stonechat was seen in the Marsh and a Snipe was flushed at Salter's Lane. On the 6<sup>th</sup> nine Stonechats were seen in the Valley with eleven on the following day (also in the Valley) matching the record set in February 2021!

On the 9<sup>th</sup> the first Common Gull of the autumn/winter was observed and six Stonechats were at Salter's Lane. The 10<sup>th</sup> revealed eight Stonechats and a Yellowhammer at Salter's Lane with a female Wheatear in the top paddock at Salter's Lane and two Stonechat on the Bund the following day. On October 12<sup>th</sup> four Stonechats were present at the Marsh, a male Mandarin being on the Clubhouse Pool of Handsworth Golf Club. The following day provided another four Stonechats at Salter's Lane. Of these, three were still there on the 14<sup>th</sup>, which also saw two at Swan Pool Meadow. The 15<sup>th</sup> provided a pair of Stonechat at Salter's Lane, with the 16<sup>th</sup> recording four Stonechats at the same venue, with a further three on the Bund! On the 18<sup>th</sup> Oystercatchers were recorded on the Reserve and a male Mandarin on the river. Also noted were three Stonechats at Salter's Lane, two in the Marsh and a single at Hill Top.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> October a Jack Snipe was seen on the island at Forge Mill, five Brambling over Hill Sixty, a single over Dartmouth Park, two male Stonechats at Swan Pool meadow with a single in the Marsh. On the 20<sup>th</sup> two or three Dunlin, two Jack Snipe, three Stonechats, Common Gull and a Peregrine flew through, flushing the Dunlin on the Reserve. A male Stonechat was sighted at Swan Pool meadow and a possible Radde's Warbler heard briefly on the south bank.

The 21<sup>st</sup> enabled records of two Ring Ouzels and a Short-eared Owl near Monk's meadow, whilst on the 22<sup>nd</sup> a Brent Goose flew south over Monk's Meadow, **the first since 1<sup>st</sup> December 1996**. In addition, there was a Brambling over Salter's Lane, a pair of Stonechat at the Marsh with a male in Monk's Meadow. A pair of Stonechat was seen again in the Marsh from the 23<sup>rd</sup> until the 26<sup>th</sup> with a Brambling being at the north end of Forge Mill on the latter date. A Mandarin was at the Slipway on October 28<sup>th</sup>. On the 29<sup>th</sup> there were five Bramblings over Hill Sixty, Mandarin on the river, a Stonechat at Hill Top and one on the Reserve. The 30<sup>th</sup> recorded the Mandarin as back at Forge Mill, the Stonechat pair still being at the Marsh. The Mandarin remained on the river on the last day of the month.



## November

### **Birds featured:**

**Barn Owl, Chiffchaff, Common Gull, Goldeneye, Kittiwake, Little Egret, Mandarin Duck, Marsh Tit, Peregrine, Raven, Red-crested Pochard, Stonechat, Tawny Owl, Woodcock and Yellow-legged Gull.**

The month started with eight Little Egrets in the roost and the Mandarin still present. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> four Stonechats were seen at Salter's Lane, three at the Marsh and a Peregrine was seen several times at Forge Mill. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> two Stonechats were at the Marsh and a single at Swan Pool meadow. On the 4<sup>th</sup> a male Stonechat was seen on the Bund as well as one at Salter's Lane plus the Barn Owl was seen again. On the 5<sup>th</sup> a first winter Kittiwake was seen and an adult Yellow-legged Gull at Swan Pool. On the 6<sup>th</sup> a male Red-crested Pochard was at Swan Pool with Stonechat on the Bund and the returning Common Gull from Oslo was back at Forge Mill for its third winter.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> the Red-crested Pochard was still present on Swan Pool. The 11<sup>th</sup> provided a record of a pair of Stonechat on the Bund. On the 12<sup>th</sup> a Woodcock was flushed from the Legion Field, a pair of Stonechat was at the Marsh, with two Barn Owls on the former Hill Top Golf Course. Another Woodcock was flushed near Cypress Pool on November 14<sup>th</sup>, as well as seven Ravens on the former golf course. The 15<sup>th</sup> provided a Tawny Owl record near Kim's field. On the 17<sup>th</sup> two Common Gulls were seen at Forge Mill – the following day seeing our first returning Goldeneye with a female in Dartmouth Park and providing further good records as two Woodcock were flushed from Hill Top and a pair of Stonechat was at Brown's fields (where a Barn Owl was also seen). A Chiffchaff was reported from the Marsh the 19<sup>th</sup>. The 25<sup>th</sup> provided yet another Stonechat record from Salter's Lane, with a Tawny Owl at High Bridges on the 27<sup>th</sup> and an unconfirmed report of Marsh Tits at Ray Hall.

## December

### **Birds featured:**

**Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Gadwall, Golden Plover, Goldeneye, Greater Black-backed Gull, Great White Egret, Jack Snipe, Moorhen, Peregrine, Redshank, Snipe (Common), Tawny Owl, Woodcock and Yellow-legged Gull.**

The month started well with a Redshank at Forge Mill - our first December record. On the 4<sup>th</sup> a Woodcock was flushed near the south bank. On the 6<sup>th</sup> a Tawny Owl was calling from Hill Top and four Goldeneyes were at Swan Pool. The 8<sup>th</sup> provided a record of a single Peregrine over Forge Mill farm and the 9<sup>th</sup>, a new record count of Gadwall, with 55 birds in the Valley. On December 10<sup>th</sup> a Tawny Owl was reported from Hill Top, the 11<sup>th</sup> seeing two Greater Black-backed Gulls on the ice at Forge Mill (an adult and a first winter bird). On the 16<sup>th</sup> a Jack Snipe was flushed by the Tame opposite the Valley Road entrance. The 17<sup>th</sup> provided a count of 30+ Golden Plover in flight over the M5 Motorway towards Swan Pool and a Chiffchaff was at Dartmouth Park. On the 18<sup>th</sup> an adult Yellow-legged Gull was noted at Dartmouth Park and later two adults were seen on Swan Pool. On the 21<sup>st</sup> a Great White Egret was seen at Forge

Mill and it was seen again on the 27<sup>th</sup> over Swan Pool. On the 24<sup>th</sup> a male Blackcap was at High Bridges, the 27<sup>th</sup> providing us with a record count of 55 Moorhen across the Valley. The 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> both saw an adult Yellow-legged Gull at Swan Pool and Tawny Owl near Tanhouse, A Snipe count on the 30<sup>th</sup> produced 33 Common and four Jack Snipe on the Reserve.

*We are indebted to Pete Hackett, Ann and Mike West for checking the records and comments below. (Ed.)*

The year provided us with plenty of interesting records, some of the smaller farm birds making a better showing. The stonechat activity was remarkable, with the heavy late summer numbers. The Cuckoo records on some ten different dates may indicate likely breeding success in the Valley during 2022. Red kite was sighted during seven months, suggesting it will not be long before residency is established. The completely unexpected record of White -tailed Lapwing was undoubtedly the find of the year.



Dave Saunders provided the following tentative comments about the status of the Raven, which looks close to establishment as a neighbouring resident, possibly on the pylons of Bescot railway sidings (Photo Andy Purcell):

‘Raven first bred in the Valley in 2016. We think they fledged two young (in 2017 and 2018). Peregrines took over the nest for a while, but on return, the Ravens fledged three in 2019, bred unsuccessfully in 2021 and fledged four in 2022’.

**The possibility of Marsh Tits being resident at Ray Hall, as has been suggested by some, is realistic. The scrub cover round the old pools is very dense and entirely inaccessible with no likelihood of disturbance, but birders will need to contact the water reclamation office in Walsall to get access if they hope to confirm presence.**

## Birds and the Cold Weather

It is March 9<sup>th</sup> and last night I went to a concert with a programme of spring music, designed to welcome the new season. This morning there are three inches of snow on the bird table and two Greenfinches on my Nyger feeder. This is quite remarkable, as I have not seen a greenfinch in the garden for at least five years. The following day, I had a female Reed Bunting, a first for the garden.

I had a similar experience in 2018, when the “Beast from the East” brought snow and freezing temperatures, twice in as many weeks. I have an old apple tree in the garden, too tall to pick all the fruit, so there are usually plenty of windfalls. I don’t normally see Fieldfares in my garden, but in 2018, soon as the snow fell, they arrived to feed on the windfalls; they disappeared again as soon as it thawed, only to reappear with the second cold snap a couple of weeks later. I haven’t seen any since.



At the beginning of December, you will remember we had a relatively prolonged cold snap. There was no snow, but the temperatures were below zero for most of the local water bodies to freeze. I do a regular walk along the Rushall Canal and around Park Lime Pits, and I count the wildfowl that I see. During this cold snap, the canal was mostly frozen and any wildfowl (3 Moorhens and a family of four Swans), concentrated in the small areas of open water, usually close to one of the bridges.

Park Lime Pits, however, was not frozen, (presumably because of its depth), and was able to provide an ice-free refuge for water birds. The Table overleaf shows counts for 12<sup>th</sup> December and visits before and immediately afterwards. The numbers for Moorhen and Coot are fairly normal and Mallards are usually inconsistent – why numbers should reduce when everywhere else was frozen adds to the inconsistency. The concentration of fish-eating birds (Heron, Cormorant and Goosander) seems remarkable. Goosanders are regular winter visitors, but I see them more often on the canal and only in twos and threes. There are always Herons about, but they are usually solitary, at least when

fishing. Cormorants are becoming more frequent and often bask in the tall trees, but again eight is more than I have seen together before.

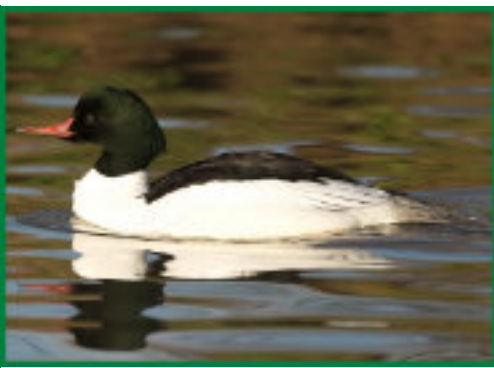
#### BIRD 'TABLE'

	2022	8th Dec	12th Dec	21st Dec
Mallard	19	6	11	
Teal	2	1	0	
Tufted Duck	0	1	0	
Goosander	5	31	0	
Moorhen	3	2	4	
Coot	1	1	2	
Little Grebe	1	3	0	
Cormorant	1	8	0	
Heron	1	4	0	

Just as interesting as the sudden concentration of birds, is the return to “normal” once the weather eased. All of this beggars the questions “Where did they come from and where did they go?” and “How did they know?”.



Cormorant (Wally Taylor)



Goosander (Andy Purcell)

Richard Orton.

*Richard's ornithological reflections bring to an end our section on the subject. If anyone has studied this bulletin and those in the immediately preceding years to mine specific data about the activity patterns of the birds mentioned, they are likely to find themselves asking precisely the same questions as those posed above. It is at this juncture that we move on to consider more data- but this time it concerns much smaller creatures. It is a remarkable fact that butterflies and moths can, like most winged animals cover great distances and pose similar questions, although most people would not put them remotely capable of the same level of decision making as birds. However as you have read in Peter Shirley's article, vast numbers are on the move and even though their numbers appear to have drastically reduced, there are enough in circulation for a few to arrive more by accident than design, in suitable habitats where they may thrive. A single female moth can produce hundreds of eggs. (Ed)*

# The lepidoptera of a Wednesbury Garden

## The Extraordinary Story of Tony Wood's Butterflies and Moths

Wildlife studies have always been an integral part of the lives of Sandra and Tony Wood. Early days in the company of Andy Purcell and many other friends led to numerous expeditions, an early interest in good photography and involvement in study of nearly everything that turned up in their garden. It was not long before Tony accepted the Chairmanship of Sandnats, following which he attended nearly all the moth nights ever organised, giving valuable advice on methodology and demonstrating a remarkable ability recognise moths that came to MV or actinic light.

Inevitably in attending to the business of Sandnats and the demands of a busy working life, his own preoccupation with wildlife in the garden went unreported and only recently, following some chance reflections with Sandra, did I realise that a whole vault of important information had to be published. Richard Orton, our own Midlands Moths specialist, was in total agreement on this, having seen the basic table of records that came to us via David Emley (Staffordshire Lepidoptera Recorder). We are very fortunate that Richard immediately decided to examine the records in a wider context and helped us to produce a reasonable preliminary account of the insects encountered.

### Tony Wood's Preliminary Notes

#### Tony Wood's Garden in Wednesbury (SO 975944)

When I first started trapping in 1982 there were two large brownfield sites close by. One was developed into a housing estate and on the other, a spine road was constructed. As can be seen from the records, some species have not been recorded since these redevelopments, presumable because of habitat loss. On a positive note, due to climate change, some moths that had a more southerly range are moving northwards and arriving in the garden.

- Dimensions: 30ft x 25ft with a small patio.
- Wildlife fish pool 6ft x3ft.
- Three raised beds for growing vegetables.
- Lawn and border with insect- friendly plants. A small Japanese Acer.
- Management with wildlife in mind, not excessively tidy!

#### Moth traps used

My first trap was a homemade wooden one I used for a few years until it started to disintegrate. Later I purchased a new 6 watt 12 volt actinic lamp, powered by a battery & charger, almost identical to the earlier model that started to fall apart. I then purchased a 20 watt mains actinic from Anglian Lepidoptera Supplies, which is my present one.

## Notable Moths all relating to VC39

The county status (in brackets) is that held by each species, at the time of its capture.

### Smaller moths

*Caloptillia semifasciata* (three county records)

*Phyllonorycter platini* (first county record 2010) *mines in London Plane: photo below*

*Oegoconia quadripuncta* (first county record 18 July 1984) since then 14 individuals recorded

*Exaeretia allisella* (four county records)

*Gelechia senticetella* (three county records)

*Coelophora lineola* (five county records)

*Helinsia lienigianus* (first county record in 2010 - last in 2017) 33 records in total

### Others who have generously assisted during the survey period.

West Midlands Moth Group and West Midlands Moths

Dave Emley (Staffordshire Moth Recorder) has supplied records held on his database.

Patrick Clement has also carried out dissections of some moths.



## Tony Wood's Moths

### A Review by Richard Orton

Tony's results are a testament to his dedication and skill as an entomologist and provide a template towards which all Sandwell Naturalists should aspire. It is this sort of long-term data which highlights the changes to the nature around us of which we are all intuitively aware. The numbers are quite mind-boggling: 15,682 records submitted, detailing the 33,935 individual moths and butterflies counted and a total of 371 different species of moth and 17 species of butterfly. All at one site!

The most frequently recorded moth was the Large Yellow Underwing, with 962 records and 3808 moths counted over the forty-year period. Second on the list is Lesser Yellow Underwing with 697 records and 2427 individuals. It is nice to know the traditional "Bob 'owlers" are still going strong. All of these moths have been recorded regularly across the survey period except for the Light Brown Apple Moth, which was not recorded before 2008. This indicates how quickly this now-ubiquitous moth has spread and established itself.

Table 1: Ten most frequently recorded moths

<i>Taxon</i>	<i>Vernacular</i>	<i>Records</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>First</i>	<i>Last</i>
<i>Noctua prurius</i>	Large Yellow Underwing	962	3808	1962	2022
<i>Noctua comes</i>	Lesser Yellow Underwing	897	2427	1962	2022
<i>Paratodes rhomboidaria</i>	Willow Beauty	503	1518	1964	2022
<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>	Light Brown Apple Moth	499	924	2006	2022
<i>Luperina festacea</i>	Floated Rustic	483	2278	1962	2022
<i>Xestia xanthographa</i>	Square-spot Rustic	453	1878	1962	2022
<i>Agrotis exclamatoria</i>	Heart and Dart	449	1929	1964	2022
<i>Hofmannophila pseudospretella</i>	Brown House-moth	378	501	1965	2022
<i>Cavadina morpheus</i>	Mottled Rustic	303	1178	1964	2022
<i>Apamea monoglypha</i>	Dark Arches	289	606	1964	2022

Table 2: Ten most frequently recorded butterflies

<i>Taxon</i>	<i>Vernacular</i>	<i>Records</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>First</i>	<i>Last</i>
<i>Pieris rapae</i>	Small White	602	852	1965	2022
<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Large White	191	247	1965	2022
<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	Comma	71	152	2007	2022
<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	Speckled Wood	66	66	2008	2022
<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	Holly Blue	61	62	2007	2022
<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	Red Admiral	55	57	1965	2022
<i>Aglais urticae</i>	Small Tortoiseshell	33	33	1965	2022
<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	Orange-tip	25	30	2010	2022
<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	Gatekeeper	22	22	2008	2022
<i>Aglais io</i>	Peacock	22	21	1965	2022

Some reduction of the amount of butterfly information may reflect Tony's working practices during parts of his recording era, when shift working patterns dominated many of his days, the bulk of the recording being concentrated on yields of moths from evening trapping sessions. He retired in 2005 and, being at home more often in the daytime, was able to accumulate more butterfly records.

With the exception of the “whites”, much lower numbers of butterflies were recorded. Perhaps the large numbers of whites is connected to garden use e.g. large vegetable patches. There seem to have been recent increases in Speckled Wood, Comma, Holly Blue, Orange-tip and Gatekeeper, none of which were recorded before 2005, more than halfway through the study period. In my own garden, I also recorded Speckled wood, Gatekeeper and Holly Blue for the first time since 2000, so this probably a wider trend of range expansion in butterfly distribution.

Delving further, just under a quarter (23%) of species was recorded only once. These might include vagrant migrant moths which have turned up by chance. For example, the Bedstraw Hawkmoth, is the equivalent in the bird-watching community of spotting the Sea Eagle which apparently circled the Valley a couple of years ago (I didn't see it !). The other explanation is that the populations are at such low density that although they are present, the chance of catching one is remote. This might explain why in some

cases, certain moths have been recorded across the whole sampling period, (e.g. *Lychnis* has been recorded seven times between 1987 and 2019).

To draw any conclusions about changes in populations requires largish numbers of records over a shorter period. To put these changes into a wider context, I have referred to the recent paper by Tony Simpson on the moth populations in near-by Worcestershire (Simpson 2023) and to “Moths of the West Midlands” by Simpson, Duncan and Williams (2020). To look at declining species, moths recorded at the beginning of the survey, but not after the year 2000 and with more than ten records, were selected.

Table 3: Species of moths lost before the year 2000

<i>Taxon</i>	<i>Vernacular</i>	<i>Records</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>First</i>	<i>Last</i>
<i>Timandra comae</i>	Blood-Vein	11	11	1984	1988
<i>Alicia repandata</i>	Mottled Beauty	11	14	1984	1989
<i>Anarta infoli</i>	Nutmeg	40	52	1984	1989
<i>Autographa jota</i>	Plain Golden Y	15	11	1982	1990
<i>Pterophorus pentadactyla</i>	White Plume	10	10	1986	1991
<i>Apamea lithoxyloea</i>	Light Arches	10	8	1984	1991
<i>Ancylis ashetana</i>		11	10	1986	1991
<i>Meaolopia furuncula</i>	Cloaked Minor	11	10	1984	1991
<i>Eupithecia assimilata</i>	Curant Pug	12	11	1985	1991
<i>Orthosia grisealis</i>	Powdered Quaker	12	12	1986	1991
<i>Aplocera afformata</i>	Lesser Treble-bar	13	14	1987	1991
<i>Cherissa obscurata</i>	Annulet	16	17	1984	1991
<i>Mythimna ferrago</i>	Clay	17	16	1985	1991
<i>Arctia caja</i>	Garden Tiger	29	36	1984	1991
<i>Euplexia lucipara</i>	Small Angle Shades	33	31	1985	1991
<i>Oligia latruncula</i>	Tawny Marbled Minor	38	69	1985	1991



Two moths ‘lost’ from the garden

Plain Golden Y (left) and Garden Tiger (right)



Although the cut-off year was 2000, all 16 of the “missing” moth species had disappeared by 1992. The Garden Tiger caterpillars (woolly bears) were once a familiar sight throughout the Black Country, but have vanished not only from the Midlands but most of southern England. Climate change and a switch to warm, wet winters and springs seems the likely cause (Randle et al 2019). The Annulet is described as “local and uncommon” in the area (Simpson et. al. 2020) and is associated with heathland, so perhaps it was a relict species from the Black Country Heaths that diminished so rapidly. Most of the other species seem to be common, but their food-plants are often docks, grasses etc. associated with derelict land. Perhaps a brown-field site was redeveloped, depriving these moths of their food-plants. Urban and suburban areas are probably very prone to local changes in habitat, as open areas get developed and gardens change from vegetable patch to decking.



*Moth trapping by light has a long history. Whilst moths will come to various light sources, the most successful types tend to be Mercury Vapour and Actinic. Here we see Tony Wood examining the catch from a mercury vapour trap (left). This type of trap is not popular in domestic settings because of the disturbance it can cause. Tony's actinic trap can be seen on the right and does not usually cause too many problems! (Ed)*

The other side of the coin is that new species have also been recorded. Table four contains moth species which have been recorded more than ten times and were first found after the year 2000. Twenty-eight species fall into this category and for some, colonisation has been very rapid and strong. The Light Brown Apple Moth was not recorded until 2008 but it is now 4<sup>th</sup> on the list of most recorded moths. It has an interesting history. It originated in Australia and was first recorded in Cornwall in 1936, from whence it spread along the south coast, before rapidly colonising northwards during the 1990s. Its spread has probably been helped by being able to breed continuously (perhaps assisted by mild winters) and by the caterpillars being able to feed on a wide variety of plants. Colonisation has probably also been helped by the garden plant trade. It is most abundant in urban and suburban areas. A similar course of events seems to have taken place with *Tachystyla acroxantha*, another Australian species, although, this example feeds in the leaf litter (Simpson 2023).

Table 4: Species of moths first recorded after the year 2000

Taxon	Vernacular	Records	Individuals	First	Last
<i>Mormo maura</i>	Old Lady	64	83	2008	2022
<i>Aphrissa sociella</i>	Bee Moth	137	196	2008	2022
<i>Agriphila stramineella</i>		157	283	2008	2022
<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>	Light Brown Apple Moth	466	924	2008	2022
<i>Lithophane leewardi</i>	Blair's Shoulder-knot	16	23	2009	2021
<i>Amblyptilia acanthadactyle</i>	Beautiful Plume	25	29	2009	2022
<i>Apocryphia nigra</i>	Black Rustic	33	36	2009	2022
<i>Mecanota dysodes</i>	Small Ranunculus	10	10	2010	2021
<i>Noctua fimbriata</i>	Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing	12	13	2010	2022
<i>Pyrausta nurella</i>		27	30	2010	2022
<i>Heliopsis lanigera</i>	Mugwort Plume	29	33	2010	2017
<i>Eudonia leucostriata</i>		51	65	2010	2022
<i>Blastobasis adustella</i>		83	128	2010	2022
<i>Agriphila gemmulella</i>		229	1378	2010	2022
<i>Oegocoris quadripuncta</i>		14	14	2011	2022
<i>Crassa unitella</i>		22	26	2011	2022
<i>Mompha substriatella</i>		28	30	2011	2022
<i>Oligia strigilis</i> agg.	Marbled Minor agg.	49	75	2011	2022
<i>Bryotropha domestica</i>		55	63	2011	2022
<i>Bryotropha affinis</i>		74	97	2011	2022
<i>Bryotropha ferralla</i>		78	94	2011	2022
<i>Tachystola scrovarantha</i>		189	304	2011	2022
<i>Crambus perfracta</i>		11	14	2012	2021
<i>Rivula sericealis</i>	Straw Dot	11	11	2013	2022
<i>Idaea seriata</i>	Small Dusty Wave	15	17	2013	2022
<i>Acrolepiopsis assectella</i>	Leek Moth	36	52	2013	2022
<i>Hoplodrina ambigua</i>	Vine's Rustic	131	308	2013	2022
<i>Hemirnis tarsipennis</i>	Fan-foot	13	16	2015	2022

The warming climate seems to be a constant factor in the spread of new species into the area. Vine's Rustic has been recorded from the south of England since the 1940's, but has spread northwards recently. The first records in Worcestershire were from 2006, but it is now common across the whole of the West Midlands. The Leek Moth was a migrant species only occasionally recorded, but is now an established resident. The first local moth was recorded in Droitwich in 2003. It is increasing and has become a pest of onions in general, making it the bane of organic gardeners across the region (Simpson 2023).

Other factors will have played their part too. For example moths like Blair's Shoulder-Knot, which feed on Cypresses have probably benefitted from the popularity of *leylandii*. Small Ranunculus feeds on Prickly Lettuce, a weed of disturbed ground, which seems to be increasing in the area, (Trueman et al 2013). Small Ranunculus was first recorded during the modern era in Kent in 1997; it has come along way quickly (Randle et al 2019).

## References

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Simpson T., Duncan I. and Williams M. (2020). “Moths of the West Midlands – Birmingham and the Black Country, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire” Pisces Publications, Newbury.

Simpson (2023). Worcestershire Record. Journal and Newsletter of Worcestershire Biological Records Centre and Worcestershire Recorders (number 50). Worcestershire Biological Records Centre Publications.

Trueman, I., Poulton, M. and Reade, P. (2012) “*Flora of Birmingham and the Black Country*” Pisces Publications, Newbury.

## The Species List

Here we list all the butterflies and moths found in Tony and Sandra's garden. Readers are reminded that these records have been accumulated in various different ways. Some have been recognised when visiting flowers(cultivated or wild), others will have been netted or tubed, whilst many have arrived at the actinic trap to receive special attention. The identification of these insects is not always easy. In reality many can be recognised with experience only and with the help of the many valuable publications and websites that are now readily available. Tony and Sandra have always been keen to get things right and have therefore readily called upon expert assistance .It remains true that a large number of moths (especially the smaller ones) still require close examination and certain specimens have had to be retained for inspection under Tony's binocular microscope . Some will be sent to a great supporter of Sandwell 'mothers' Patrick Clement for genitalic dissection. Below is a wonderful example of his work for a national database (I think Tony Wood might have been at this moth night).



The species appear in checklist order with scientific name followed by a vernacular name when one is available: ‘*Emmelina monodactyla* Common Plume’

Most of the photographs have been taken by Tony Wood, with a few additional ones added by the Editor. A considerable number of larger moths are mentioned as Endangered or Vulnerable by Butterfly Conservation. They have suffered fairly dramatic declines in population since the last century. They are marked as follows: BC Endangered- **red** . BC Vulnerable **green**. Each family is briefly described before the species are listed.

**Hepialidae** (Ghost and Swift Moths)

*Triodia sylvina* Orange Swift, *Korscheltellus lupulina* **Common Swift, Hepialus humuli** **Ghost Moth**

**Nepticulidae** (serpentine leaf mining moths)

*Stigmella aurella*

**Incurvariidae** (case-bearing leaf miners)

*Incurvaria masculella*

**Tischeriidae** (the species here mines bramble)

*Coptotriche marginea*

**Bucculatricidae** (the species here mines Lime tree leaves)

*Bucculatrix thoracella*

**Gracillariidae** (another family where the species start larval life as leaf miners)

*Caloptilia azaleella* Azalea Leaf Miner, *Caloptilia semifascia*, *Phyllonorycter platani*, *Cameraria ohridella*



Bird Cherry Ermine (Mike Bloxham)

**Yponomeutidae** (leaf mining larvae often emerging to feed gregariously externally with production of conspicuous webs)

*Yponomeuta evonymella* Bird-cherry Ermine, *Yponomeuta padella/malinellus*,

*Yponomeuta cagnagella* Spindle Ermine, *Yponomeuta rorrella* Willow Ermine



*Ypsolopha sequella* (Mike Bloxham)

**Ypsolophidae** (larvae on various trees and shrubs)

*Ypsolopha dentella* Honeysuckle Moth, *Ypsolopha scabrella*, *Ypsolopha sequella*

**Plutellidae** (larvae of the species here feed on plants of the Cabbage family)

*Plutella xylostella* Diamond-back Moth

**Glyphipterigidae** (the moth here is one of the rapidly spreading ‘pest’ species)

*Acrolepiopsis assectella* Leek Moth

**Argyresthiidae** (tiny bronze/gold moths with larvae feeding internally within the growing buds of shrubs and trees)

*Argyresthia trifasciata*, *Argyresthia goedartella*, *Argyresthia spinosella*, *Argyresthia albistria*

**Lyonetiidae** (larvae in linear or blotch mines on leaves-can be very numerous)

*Lyonetia clerkella* Apple Leaf Miner

**Scythropiidae** (larvae of this moth feed gregariously on Hawthorn causing webs)

*Scythropia crataegella* Hawthorn Moth

**Autostichidae** (larvae associated with leaf litter and dried vegetable matter)

*Oegoconia quadripuncta*

**Oecophoridae** (larvae in fungi and a variety of dead animal or vegetable matter)

*Endrosis sarcitrella* White-shouldered House-moth, *Hofmannophila pseudospretella* Brown House-moth, *Borkhausenia fuscescens*, *Crassa unitella*, *Batia lunaris*, *Esperia sulphurella*, *Tachystola acroxantha*

**Chimabachidae** (larvae feed between spun flat leaves on deciduous trees & shrubs)

*Diurnea flagella*

**Peleopodidae** (larvae in a flat silken web on underside of leaves of many trees and shrubs)

*Carcina quercana*

**Depressariidae** (larvae often tube spinners on a variety of leaves in the herb area)

*Exaeretia allisella*, *Agonopterix scopariella*, *Agonopterix arenella*, *Agonopterix nervosa*, *Depressaria radiella* Parsnip Moth, *Depressaria badiella*, *Depressaria daucella*



*Limnaecia phragmitella* (Mike Bloxham)

**Cosmopterigidae** (larvae of this moth in seed heads and stems of bulrush species)

*Limnaecia phragmitella*

**Gelechiidae** (larvae in a variety of plants, some feed internally some are web spinners )

*Helcystogramma rufescens*, *Bryotropha domestica*, *Bryotropha terrella*, *Bryotropha affinis*, *Gelechia senticetella*, *Scrobipalpa costella*, *Carpatolechchia fugitivella*

**Batrachedridae** (larva of the species here mines Norway Spruce needles)

*Batrachedra pinicolella*

**Coleophoridae** (larvae mobile within characteristic cases within which they often pupate)

*Coleophora serratella*, *Coleophora lineola*

**Elachistidae** (larvae leaf miners in grasses and sedges)

*Elachista argentella*, *Elachista maculicerusella*

**Momphidae** (Larvae develop in seedheads of several willowherb species)

*Mompha subbistrigella*

**Blastobasidae** (probably introduced and spreading- larvae in vegetable matter)

*Blastobasis adustella*, *Blastobasis lacticolella*

**Alucitidae** (with unique wing structure, this moth feeds on Honeysuckle)

*Alucita hexadactyla* Many-plumed Moth

**Pterophoridae** (instantly recognisable, larvae feed on a variety of herbaceous Plants)

*Platyptilia gonodactyla* Triangle Plume, *Amblyptilia acanthodactyla* Beautiful Plume,

*Stenoptilia pterodactyla* Brown Plume, *Pterophorus pentadactyla* White Plume,

*Hellinsia lienigianus* Mugwort Plume, *Emmelina monodactyla* Common Plume



*Emmelina monodactyla* (Common Plume)

Photo by Tony Wood



*Geranium Plume*

Photo by Mike Bloxham

Two examples from this family of fragile and skeletal moths. Several are common and examples are quite conspicuous in flight,

**Choreutidae** (the species here normally feeds in an upper-side web on Common Stinging Nettle).

*Anthophila fabriciana* Nettle Tap

**Tortricidae** (the largest family of smaller moths, with larvae developing on a wide range of trees, shrubs and herbs. The rather broad forewings are a useful character for recognising them and the general appearance of the moths at rest is also a valuable clue- this can be seen in some of the included photos).

*Ditula angustiorana* Red-barred Tortrix, *Archips podana* Large Fruit-tree Tortrix,

*Pandemis corylana* Chequered Fruit-tree Tortrix, *Pandemis cerasana* Barred Fruit-

tree Tortrix, *Pandemis heparana* Dark Fruit-tree Tortrix,

*Syndemis musculana*, *Epinotia ramella*, *Clepsis spectrana* Cyclamen Tortrix, *Clepsis*

*consimilana*, *Epiphyas postvittana* Light Brown Apple Moth, *Lozotaenoides*

*formosana*, *Tortrix viridana* Green Oak Tortrix, *Acleris forsskalleana*, *Acleris*

*rhombana* Rhomboid Tortrix, *Acleris holmiana*, *Acleris emargana*, *Acleris variegana*



Garden Rose Tortrix, *Acleris aspersana*, *Acleris hastiana*, *Pseudargyrotoza conwagana*, *Agapeta hamana*, *Aethes smeathmanniana*, *Aethes rubigana*, *Neocochylis dubitana*, *Cochylichroa atricapitana*, *Eudemis profundana*, *Apotomis turbidana*, *Apotomis betuletana*, *Hedya nubiferana* Marbled Orchard Tortrix, *Hedya pruniana* Plum Tortrix, *Celypha striana*, *Celypha lacunana*, *Bactra lancealana*, *Ancylis Badiana*, *Ancylis achatana*, *Spilonota ocellana* Bud Moth, *Epinotia tenerana* Nut Bud Moth, *Epinotia ramella*, *Epinotia bilunana*, *Epinotia nisella*, *Eucosma hohenwartiana*, *Eucosma campoliliana*, *Eucosma pupillana*, *Gypsonoma aceriana*, *Epiblema foenella*, *Notocelia cynosbatella*, *Notocelia uddmanniana* Bramble Shoot Moth, *Notocelia roborana*, *Notocelia rosaecolana*, *Clavigesta purdeyi* Pine Leaf-mining Moth, *Rhyacionia pinicolana*, *Rhyacionia pinivorana* Spotted Shoot Moth, *Dichrorampha petiverella*, *Cydia pomonella* Codling Moth, *Cydia splendana*, *Pammene fasciana*, *Pammene aurita*.



Upper left *Acleris forsskaleana*  
Lower left *Notocelia uddmanniana*

Upper right *Eucosma pupillana*  
Lower right *Epiphyas postvittana*



## Notes on the photos opposite

*Acleris forsskaeana* larvae are common on Field Maple and Sycamore

*Eucosma pupillana* (Notable B) is an example of a declining moth. Larvae feed on Wormwood- once a very common plant in B & BC, but now possibly scarcer as the old waste sites are developed.

*Notocelia uddmanniana* (Bramble Shoot Moth) was once extremely common, but in spite of the expansion of the foodplant, may have recently declined in numbers.

*Epiphyas postvittana* (Light -brown Apple Moth) is an example of a rampant spreader -as mentioned earlier in the account. These four photos were taken by Mike Bloxham.

**Zygaenidae** (usually strikingly coloured -the species here is black and red in colouration and variation is not infrequent. Larvae on clovers and vetches).

*Zygaena lonicerae* Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet

**Pieridae** (the three families of butterfly mentioned here contain insects that are very familiar to readers).

*Anthocharis cardamines* Orange-tip, *Pieris brassicae* Large White, *Pieris rapae* Small White, *Pieris napi* Green-veined White, *Gonepteryx rhamni* Brimstone

## Nymphalidae

*Lasiommata megera* Wall, *Pararge aegeria* Speckled Wood, *Maniola jurtina* Meadow Brown, *Pyronia tithonus* Gatekeeper, *Vanessa atalanta* Red Admiral, *Vanessa cardui* Painted Lady, *Aglais io* Peacock, *Aglais urticae* Small Tortoiseshell, *Polygonia c-album* Comma

## Lycaenidae

*Lycaena phlaeas* Small Copper, *Celastrina argiolus* Holly Blue, *Polyommatus icarus* Common Blue

**Pyrallidae** ( a remarkable set of moths, with larvae developing in a wide range of situations-some in the nests of bees and wasps. A number are associated with freshwater situations- some are synanthropic (you will find them in stored foodstuff)- and a number can be found in the garden on grasses and shrubs).

*Aphomia sociella* Bee Moth, *Galleria mellonella* Wax Moth, *Dioryctria abietella*, *Acrobasis advenella*, *Myelies circumvoluta*, *Phycitodes binaevella*, *Hypsopygia costalis* Gold Triangle, *Hypsopygia glaucinalis*

## Crambidae (notes as for Pyralidae)

*Pyrausta aurata*, *Anania coronata*, *Anania hortulata* Small Magpie, *Udea lutealis*, *Udea prunalis*, *Patania ruralis* Mother of Pearl, *Nomophila noctuella* Rush Veneer, *Evergestis forficalis* Garden Pebble, *Scoparia subfusca*, *Scoparia ambigualis*, *Eudonia lacustrata*, *Eudonia murana*, *Eudonia angustata*, *Eudonia truncicolella*,

*Eudonia mercurella*, *Calamotropha paludella*, *Chrysoteuchia culmella* Garden Grass-  
 veneer, *Crambus pascuella*, *Crambus lathoniellus*, *Crambus perlella*, *Agriphila*  
*tristella*, *Agriphila inquinatella*, *Agriphila latistria*, *Agriphila straminella*,  
*Agriphila geniculea*, *Elophila nymphaeata* Brown China-mark, *Cataclysta lemnata*  
 Small China-mark, *Nymphula nitidulata* Beautiful China-mark, *Donacaula forficella*.



Upper left: *Udea lutealis*      Upper right: *Elophila nymphaeata* Brown China-mark  
 Lower left *Pyrausta aurata*      Lower right: *Nomophila noctuella* Rush Veneer  
 (Lower right photo by Tony Wood. Remainder by Mike Bloxham)

**Drepanidae** (distinctive larger moths often with characteristic wing shapes).

*Drepana falcataria* Pebble Hook-tip, *Cilix glaucata* Chinese Character, **Habrosyne**  
**pyritoides** **Buff Arches**

**Sphingidae** (The well known hawk moths .The species in the photo opposite, taken by  
 Tony Wood, is rarely encountered in Britain. Several of the other species are almost  
 certainly going to be noticed- especially the Lime Hawk Moth where there are street  
 trees. Most are large and distinctive-as are the larvae).

*Mimas tiliae* Lime Hawk-moth, *Smerinthus ocellata* Eyed Hawk-moth, *Laothoe populi* Poplar Hawk-moth, *Macroglossum stellatarum* Humming-bird Hawk-moth, *Hyles gallii* Bedstraw Hawk-moth, *Deilephila elpenor* Elephant Hawk-moth



**Geometridae** (a large family with larvae on a wide range of trees, shrubs and other vegetation—often called inchworms or loopers).

*Idaea seriata* Small Dusty Wave, *Idaea dimidiata* Single-dotted Wave, *Idaea biselata* Small Fan-footed Wave, *Idaea aversata* Riband Wave, *Idaea straminata* Plain Wave, **Timandra comae** **Blood-Vein**, *Cyclophora punctaria* Maiden's Blush, **Scotopteryx chenopodiata** **Shaded Broad-bar**, *Xanthorhoe fluctuata* Garden Carpet, *Xanthorhoe spadicearia* Red Twin-spot Carpet, **Xanthorhoe ferrugata** **Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet**, *Xanthorhoe montanata* Silver-ground Carpet, *Camptogramma bilineata* Yellow Shell, *Epirrhoe alternata* Common Carpet, **Pelurga comitata** **Dark Spinach**, *Hydriomena furcata* July Highflyer, **Eulithis mellinata** **Spinach**, **Ecliptopera silaceata** **Small Phoenix**, *Chloroclysta siterata* Red-Green Carpet, *Dysstroma truncata* Common Marbled Carpet, *Colostygia pectinataria* Green Carpet, *Operophtera brumata* Winter Moth, *Asthena albulata* Small White Wave, *Perizoma alchemillata* Small Rivulet, *Gymnoscelis rufifasciata* Double-striped Pug, *Chloroclystis v-ata* V-Pug, *Pasiphila rectangularata* Green Pug, *Scotopteryx chenopodiata* Shaded Broadbar, *Eupithecia tenuiata* Slender Pug, *Eupithecia linariata* Toadflax Pug, *Eupithecia pulchellata* Foxglove Pug, *Eupithecia abbreviata* Brindled Pug, *Eupithecia simpliciatata* Plain Pug, *Eupithecia centaureata* Lime-speck Pug, *Eupithecia intricata* Freyer's Pug, *Eupithecia absinthiata* Wormwood Pug, *Eupithecia assimilatata* Currant Pug, *Eupithecia vulgata* Common Pug, *Eupithecia*

*icterata* Tawny Speckled Pug, *Eupithecia succenturiata* Bordered Pug, *Eupithecia subfuscata* Grey Pug, *Aplocera plagiata* Treble-bar, *Aplocera efformata* Lesser Treble-bar, **Chesias legatella** **Streak**, *Acasis viretata* Yellow-barred Brindle, *Abraxas grossulariata* Magpie Moth, *Lomaspilis marginata* Clouded Border, *Chiasmia clathrata* Latticed Heath, *Petrophora chlorosata* Brown Silver-line, *Opisthograptis luteolata* Brimstone Moth, *Ennomos alniaria* Canary-shouldered Thorn, *Selenia dentaria* Early Thorn, *Odontopera bidentata* Scalloped Hazel, *Crocallis elinguaris* Scalloped Oak, *Ourapteryx sambucaria* Swallow-tailed Moth, *Colotois pennaria* Feathered Thorn, *Alsophila aescularia* March Moth, **Lycia hirtaria** **Brindled Beauty**, *Biston betularia* Peppered Moth, *Agriopis aurantiaria* Scarce Umber, *Agriopis marginaria* Dotted Border, *Peribatodes rhomboidaria* Willow Beauty, *Alcis repandata* Mottled Beauty, *Bupalus piniaria* Bordered White, *Cabera pusaria* Common White Wave, *Cabera exanthemata* Common Wave, *Campaea margaritaria* Light Emerald, *Charissa obscurata* Annulet, *Geometra papilionaria* Large Emerald, **Hemistola chrysoprasaria** **Small Emerald**, *Hemithea aestivaria* Common Emerald,



1. Top left :Toadflax Pug      2. centre: Lime - speck Pug      3. Top right: Magpie Moth
  4. Lower left: Scalloped Oak      5. centre: Peppered Moth      6. Lower right: Yellow Shell
- Photos 1,2 & 6 by Mike Bloxham. Photos 3,4 & 6 by Tony Wood.

**Notodontidae** (Prominent and kitten moths with distinctive structures)

*Cerura vinula* Puss Moth, *Pheosia tremula* Swallow Prominent, *Pterostoma palpina* Pale Prominent, *Ptilodon capucina* Coxcomb Prominent, *Phalera bucephala* Buff-tip



**Erebidae** (closely related to noctuids but separable by larval and other characteristics)  
*Scoliopteryx libatrix* Herald, *Rivula sericealis* Straw Dot, *Hypena proboscidalis* Snout, *Calliteara pudibunda* Pale Tussock, *Orgyia antiqua* Vapourer, **Spilosoma lutea** Buff Ermine, *Diaphora mendica* Muslin Moth, *Phragmatobia fuliginosa* Ruby Tiger, **Arctia caja** Garden Tiger, **Tyria jacobaeae** Cinnabar, *Nudaria mundana* Muslin Footman, *Herminia tarsipennalis* Fan-foot, *Herminia grisealis* Small Fan-foot, *Catocala nupta* Red Underwing



Left: Buff Ermine (by Tony Wood)

Right: Red Underwing (by Mike Bloxham)

**Noctuidae** ( large family containing many moths often found in houses and light traps)  
*Abrostola tripartita* Spectacle, *Abrostola triplasia* Dark Spectacle, *Diachrysia chrysitis* Burnished Brass,  
*Autographa gamma* Silver Y, *Autographa pulchrina* Beautiful Golden Y, *Autographa jota* Plain Golden Y,  
*Acronicta tridens/psi* Dark Dagger / Grey Dagger, *Acronicta aceris* Sycamore,  
**Acronicta rumicis** Knot Grass, *Subacronicta megacephala* Poplar Grey, *Cucullia absinthii* Wormwood, *Cucullia verbasci* Mullein, *Amphipyra pyramidea* Copper Underwing, *Amphipyra pyramidea* agg. Copper Underwing agg., **Amphipyra tragopoginis** Mouse Moth, *Xylocampa areola* Early Grey, *Bryophila domestica* Marbled Beauty, **Caradrina morpheus** Mottled Rustic, *Caradrina clavipalpis* Pale Mottled Willow, *Hoplodrina octogenaria* Uncertain, **Hoplodrina blanda** Rustic, *Hoplodrina ambigua* Vine's Rustic, *Charanyca trigrammica* Treble Lines, *Mormo maura* Old Lady, *Thalpophila matura* Straw Underwing, *Phlogophora meticulosa* Angle Shades, *Euplexia lucipara* Small Angle Shades, *Eremobia ochroleuca* Dusky Sallow, *Gortyna flavago* Frosted Orange, **Hydraecia micacea** Rosy Rustic, *Luperina testacea* Flounced Rustic, *Nonagria typhae* Bulrush Wainscot, **Apamea remissa** Dusky Brocade, *Apamea crenata* Clouded-bordered Brindle, *Apamea sordens* Rustic Shoulder-knot, *Apamea unanimis* Small Clouded Brindle, *Apamea monoglypha* Dark Arches, **Apamea lithoxyla** Light Arches, *Mesapamea secalis* Common Rustic, *Mesapamea secalis* agg. Common Rustic agg., **Litoligia literosa** Rosy Minor, *Mesoligia furuncula* Cloaked Minor, *Oligia strigilis* Marbled Minor, *Oligia strigilis*

agg. Marbled Minor agg., *Oligia latruncula* Tawny Marbled Minor, *Oligia fasciuncula* Middle-barred Minor, **Cirrhia icteritia** Sallow, **Agricola lychnids** **Beaded Chestnut**, **Anchoscelis litura** **Brown-spot Pinion**, *Leptologia lota* Red-line Quaker, *Sunira circellaris* Brick, *Omphaloscelis lunosa* Lunar Underwing, *Conistra vaccinii* Chestnut, *Lithophane leautieri* Blair's Shoulder-knot, *Eupsillia transversa* Satellite, *Cosmia trapezina* Dun-bar, *Parastichtis suspecta* Suspected, *Griposia aprilina* Merveille du Jour, *Antitype chi* Grey Chi, **Aporophyla lutulenta** **Deep-brown Dart**, *Aporophyla nigra* Black Rustic, *Orthosia incerta* Clouded Drab, *Orthosia cerasi* Common Quaker, *Orthosia cruda* Small Quaker,



Upper left: Plain Golden Y  
Lower left: Blair's Shoulder Knot

Upper right: Angle Shades  
Lower right: Bright-line Brown-eye

Photos by Tony Wood

**Orthosia gracilis** **Powdered Quaker**, *Orthosia gothica* Hebrew Character, **Tholera decimalis** **Feathered Gothic**, *Cerapteryx graminis* Antler Moth, *Anarta trifolii* Nutmeg, *Lacanobia thalassina* Pale-shouldered Brocade, *Lacanobia oleracea* Bright-line Brown-eye, **Melanchra persicariae** **Dot Moth**, **Ceramica pisi** **Broom Moth**, *Mamestra brassicae* Cabbage Moth, *Sideridis rivularis* Champion, *Hecatera bicolorata* Broad-barred White, *Hecatera dysodea* Small Ranunculus, *Hadena bicruris* Lychnis, *Hadena compta* Varied Coronet, *Mythimna conigera* Brown-line Bright-eye, *Mythimna impura* Smoky Wainscot, *Mythimna straminea* Southern Wainscot,



Upper left: The Campion

Upper right: Heart and Dart

Lower left: Ingrailed Clay

Lower right: Autumnal Rustic

Photos by Tony Wood

*Mythimna ferrago* Clay, **Leucania comma** **Shoulder-striped Wainscot**, *Agrotis exclamationis* Heart and Dart, *Agrotis segetum* Turnip Moth, *Agrotis puta* Shuttle-shaped Dart, *Agrotis ipsilon* Dark Sword-grass, *Axylia putris* Flame, *Ochropleura plecta* Flame Shoulder, *Diarsia mendica* Ingrailed Clay, **Diarsia rubi** **Small Square-spot**, *Cerastis rubricosa* Red Chestnut, *Lycophotia porphyrea* True Lover's Knot, *Noctua pronuba* Large Yellow Underwing, *Noctua fimbriata* Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing, *Noctua comes* Lesser Yellow Underwing, *Noctua interjecta* Least Yellow Underwing, *Noctua janthe* Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing, **Graphiphora augur** **Double Dart**, *Xestia baja* Dotted Clay, *Xestia xanthographa* Square-spot Rustic, *Xestia sexstrigata* Six-striped Rustic, *Xestia c-nigrum* Setaceous Hebrew Character, *Xestia triangulum* Double Square-spot, **Eugnorisma glareosa** **Autumnal Rustic**, *Naenia typica* Gothic.

**Nolidae** ( a small family in British Isles. Small and dowdy , a distinguishing feature being a silk cocoon with a vertical exit slit)

*Nola cucullatella* Short-cloaked Moth, *Nycteola revayana* Oak Nycteoline.

*Readers are reminded that full details on each moth species are held at Staffordshire Ecological Record <http://www.staffs-ecology.org.uk> Richard Orton (as our local representative ) also holds an excel copy of the full record set (Ed)*

## Sandwell and St. Margaret's Moth Trapping

Sandwell Naturalists went mothing four times in 2022, twice to St. Margaret's Churchyard, Great Barr, and once each to Sot's Hole and the RSPB Visitor's Centre. 192 individual moths of 63 species were caught.

The year did not start off too well when Chris Bird was ill and we couldn't get into St. Margaret's churchyard. However, we set up in the blocked-off lane outside. The table trap only was set up, as it was chilly with a strong easterly breeze gusting along the pylon clearing. After two hours we had caught just two micro moths (*Dyseriocrania subpurpurella* & *Agonopterix arenella*), a caddis-fly and a ground beetle, so we packed up early. Originally there were three of us, but we were joined briefly by some rather dodgy - looking characters who were wondering what we were doing. It turned out they worked at the nearby children's home and were fascinated by what we were up to. The moral is 'never judge by appearances!'

We tried again towards the end of May. Again it was very cold and the catch was low for that time of year. However, we did catch a Treble Lines, which although common generally in the west Midlands, had not been found in either Sandwell Valley or Sutton Park.

In July, we visited Sot' Hole and had a busy night, with 100 moths of 33 different species caught. The list included Large Twin-spot Carpet, which is uncommon in the West Midlands and new to the Valley. We also caught a Dingy Shears, last recorded in 2004. The other highlight was the Coronet, which is becoming more frequent in the area as its range expands northwards.

Our final event was a public event at the RSPB Visitor's Centre. We caught 73 moths of 27 species, amongst which was a Maiden's Blush. This moth was first recorded in the valley in 1986, but then disappeared until 2020. Since then, we have recorded it every year. We also caught a spectacular gold spot, which made a fitting ending to the season.





## Summary Table of Moths Recorded in Sot's Hole

<i>Taxon</i>	<i>Vernacular</i>	<i>SOT'S 15/07/2022</i>
<i>Carcina quercana</i>	Oak Long-horn	9
<i>Aphomia sociella</i>	Bee Moth	2
<i>Anania hortulata</i>	Small Magpie	2
<i>Patania ruralis</i>	Mother of Pearl	8
<i>Chrysoteuchia culmella</i>	Garden Grass-veneer	1
<i>Agriphila straminella</i>	a moth	1
<i>Habrosyne pyraloides</i>	Buff Arches	3
<i>Ideea dimidiata</i>	Single-dotted Wave	1
<i>Ideea biselata</i>	Small Fan-footed Wave	18
<i>Ideea aversata</i>	Riband Wave	7
<i>Xanthorhoe quadrifasciata</i>	Large Twin-spot Carpet	1
<i>Chloroclystis v-ata</i>	V-Pug	1
<i>Opisthographis luteofata</i>	Brimstone Moth	5
<i>Crocallis elinguaris</i>	Scalloped Oak	1
<i>Ourapteryx sambucaria</i>	Swallow-tailed Moth	5
<i>Alois repandata</i>	Mottled Beauty	1
<i>Campaea margaritana</i>	Light Emerald	4
<i>Notodonta dromedarius</i>	Iron Prominent	2
<i>Leucoma salicis</i>	White Satin	1
<i>Lymantria monacha</i>	Black Arches	2
<i>Eilema griseola</i>	Dingy Footman	7
<i>Eilema lurideola</i>	Common Footman	3
<i>Hemirbia tarsipennalis</i>	Fan-foot	1
<i>Laspeyria flexula</i>	Beautiful Hook-tip	1
<i>Abrostola tripartita</i>	Spectacle	1
<i>Craniophora ligustri</i>	Coronet	1
<i>Bryophila domestica</i>	Marbled Beauty	1
<i>Cosmia trapezina</i>	Dun-bar	1
<i>Apterogenum ypsilon</i>	Dingy Shears	1
<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	Large Yellow Underwing	1
<i>Xestia triangulum</i>	Double Square-spot	3



## Summary Table of Moths Recorded at the RSPB

<b>Taxon</b>	<b>Vernacular</b>	<b>RSPB 27/08/2022</b>
<i>Triodia sylvina</i>	Orange Swift	2
<i>Ypsalopha sequeila</i>	Rabbit-marked moth	1
<i>Plutella xylostella</i>	Diamond-back Moth	1
<i>Pandemis corylana</i>	Chequered Fruit-tree Tortrix	1
<i>Cydia pomonella</i>	Codling Moth	1
<i>Patania ruralis</i>	Mother of Pearl	2
<i>Agriphila tristella</i>	a moth	2
<i>Agriphila geniculea</i>	a moth	2
<i>Elophila nymphaeata</i>	Brown China-mark	4
<i>Cataglyphis lemnaea</i>	Small China-mark	1
<i>Watsonella binaria</i>	Oak Hook-tip	2
<i>Cyclophora punctaria</i>	Maiden's Blush	1
<i>Colostygia pectinataria</i>	Green Carpet	1
<i>Opisthograptis luteolata</i>	Brimstone Moth	3
<i>Ennomos fuscantaria</i>	Dusky Thorn	1
<i>Plusia festucae</i>	Gold Spot	1
<i>Amipipyras spp agg</i>	Copper Underwing agg.	4
<i>Hoplodrina ambigua</i>	Vine's Rustic	4
<i>Thalophila matura</i>	Straw Underwing	1
<i>Atethmia centrago</i>	Centre-barred Sallow	3
<i>Mythimna pallens</i>	Common Wainscot	1
<i>Agrotis segetum</i>	Turnip Moth	1
<i>Ochropleura plecta</i>	Flame Shoulder	7
<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	Large Yellow Underwing	6
<i>Noctua janthe</i>	Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow	3
<i>Xestia xanthographa</i>	Square-spot Rustic	12
<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>	Setaceous Hebrew Character	5

### Footnote (Ed)

We again must thank Richard Orton for this final report in the entomology section for last year. You will be pleased to hear that most of your wildlife records find their way eventually onto one of the national recording schemes such as EcoRecord, Staffordshire Ecological Record and iRecord. Nonetheless, rather like the digital morass into which we can sink every day, it is surprising how much information is lost or misdirected. Therefore it remains important to contact a relevant society, for example the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society directly. You can then contact the very person to whom your data is most immediately useful. Don't worry too much about record duplication. That can be dealt with. Send your data- it may be vital to someone!

## Conservation Activities on Rowley Hills 2022

During January and February, Friends of Rowley Hills volunteers were kept busy controlling bramble and hawthorn on Portway Hill to retain open grassland habitats, which without intervention, would mostly become lost to scrub. However, the retention of large areas of bramble and scrub vegetation is equally important, as this habitat provides food, shelter, and nesting sites for small rodents and birds.

The vegetation from the scrub clearance work is stacked into mounds and left to slowly decompose, providing habitats for invertebrates, spiders, foraging birds and small rodents.

Every spring, two of our passage migrant warblers, Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat fly all the way from Africa and Asia to breed here.



Volunteering days with the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country continued, and early in 2022 we welcomed Jake Williams, who has taken over the role

from Tom Hartland-Smith as the Wildlife Trust's representative on the Portway Hill site. We sent our grateful thanks to Tom who has now moved on to another post.

One of Jake's first year volunteering tasks on the land owned by the Wildlife Trust, was to clear scrub vegetation from the rock face and maintain the open grassland habitat. This included an important project to provide a pathway along the base of the rock exposure, enabling visitors to examine at close quarters the columnar jointing and nodular exfoliation of this UNESCO Geopark attraction.



In past years, grass fires were commonplace on Rowley Hills, but in recent times there have been very few. On July 19<sup>th</sup> as the UK basked in temperatures exceeding 30°C, and with no rain for several weeks, a spontaneous grass fire broke out on Portway Hill. Fortunately, West Midland Fire Service were quick to respond, and the fire was under control before it reached the houses and garden fences in St. Brades Close.

The Fire breaks out!





The Fire is extinguished



The Aftermath: it could have been so much worse!

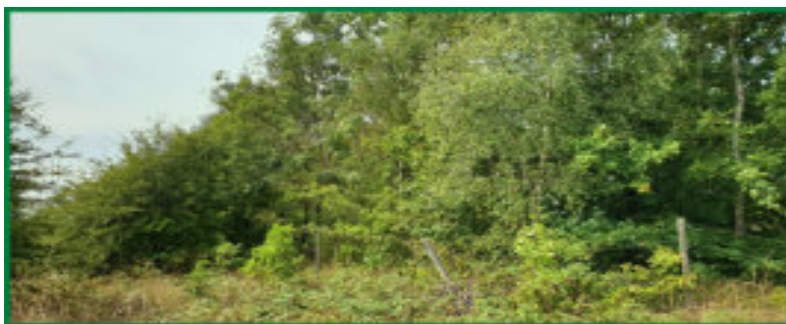
In the weeks that followed, an arborist company was hired by the current owner of the parcel of land where the fire had occurred. The arborists were tasked with clearing previously felled trees strewn along the bank at the back of the houses and gardens in St Brades Close, a short distance from where the fire had taken place.

This came as a welcome relief to residents whose gardens backed on to the site. However, once the felled trees on the bank had been cleared and chipped, and still working under the directive of the landowner, the arborists then proceeded to clear-fell and chip the growing trees in the nearby fenced-off Millennium planted coppice! This led to complaints from residents prompting a visit from a Sandwell Council Environmental Enforcement Officer, and a response from The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. The complaints were passed on to the Forestry Commission, who visited the site and measured the volume of felled timber. We later heard that the Forestry Commission believed that the Forestry Act had been breached and the matter had been escalated to their national office for consideration. No further information is available at the time of submitting this report.





Previously felled trees on the banks of houses and gardens in St.Brades Close



The Millennium Plantation before it was felled!!



The Millennium plantation has been destroyed!

With so many wood chippings at our disposal, our volunteers spent several sessions spreading them along the public rights of way crossing the hillside, to make walking across the site a safer and more enjoyable experience for members of the public.

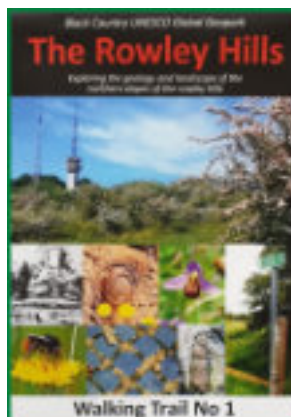


**Unexpectedly large piles of wood chippings following the events mentioned!**



**These chippings are put to good use along our public footpaths**

August saw the launch of the first Rowley Hills Walking Trail Guide 'Exploring the Geology and Landscape of the Northern Slopes of the Rowley Hills'. The design and most of the written information included in this guide was provided by Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project Coordinator, Graham Worton, and our grateful thanks go out to him for an excellent piece of work



Elsewhere on Rowley Hills, during the months of autumn, work began on clearing encroaching hawthorn, blackthorn, and bramble from a one-acre flora-rich hillside paddock near Warrens Hall Riding Stables. For many years this paddock had been grazed by a single pony, but for the past five years no grazing whatsoever had taken place and the paddock was slowly becoming enveloped from all sides by scrub. After a concerted effort by volunteers, it has now been restored to open grassland and is being lightly grazed through the winter months by two Shetland cross ponies from the riding stables. Hopefully, going forward, this will have a beneficial effect on the flora and fauna found here.



Upper left: the managed paddock.

Upper right: the cleared scrub stacks

Lower left: Green-veined white.  
on Devil's-bit Scabious

Lower right: the wildflower area  
with many wild flowers

Photographs by Andy Purcell (upper left) and Mike Poulton.



## Nick Horton's 2022 Wildlife sightings

Included in this year's report is a summary of birds seen on the Portway Hill site in 2022 from local birder Nick Horton. He tells us Swallows and House Martins were probably at their lowest numbers in the 20 or so years that he has been watching birds on the Rowley Hills, and Swift numbers seemed also to be low.

He had only one sighting of a Stonechat (female) this year. In past years they were regular visitors. There was also a noticeable drop in Greenfinch numbers. On the positive side, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Wren, Robin, Blue, Great, Coal, and Long-tailed Tit all did well.

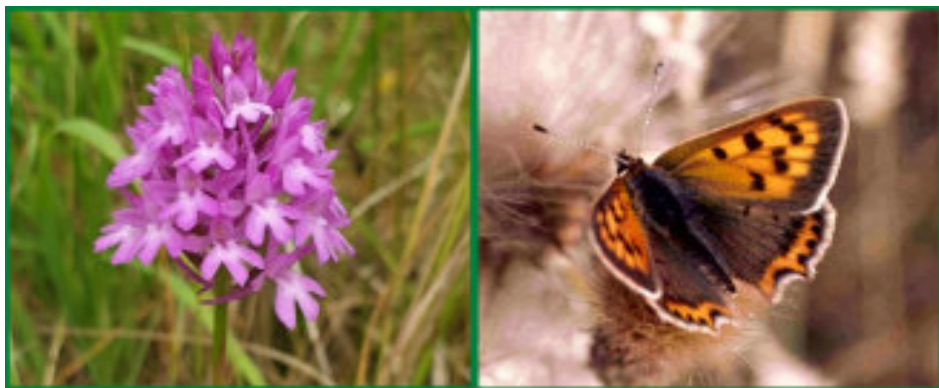
Of our five breeding warblers, over ten pairs of Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Whitethroat were recorded the site. One pair of Lesser Whitethroats nested in brambles behind Midhill Drive and one male Garden Warbler was heard singing behind the Rowley Olympic building.

Peregrine, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, and Kestrel were all regularly seen, and on three occasions he saw all four on the site on the same day. Overflying Red Kites were also spotted on at least three occasions. Migrants noted since September included a pair of Whinchat, one Wheatear, six Redstarts, six Tree Pipits and a single female Ring Ouzel (after worms on the freshly cut grass at Portway farm).

Last winter brought in Siskin (on the crest of the hill), Meadow Pipits also being regularly visitors, with Goldcrest and Blackcap frequenting the bird feeders. His highlights of 2022 included, watching an adult Green Woodpecker showing a young bird how to get into one of the site's numerous ant hills and observing a Peregrine in its characteristic hunting stoop on several occasions. Hearing the female Tawny Owl calling on the bank near the Wildlife Trust land and seeing the local Ravens from Edwin Richards Quarry being mobbed by crows and magpies, were also high points of the season. A Kingfisher flying from near the Wildlife Trust land heading over towards Edale Pool was a 'first' for the site.

His ultimate highlight was on the very warm day of the Butterfly count. Together with his daughter-in-law, and two of his grandsons, he was delighted to be able to get quite close to a male Black Redstart feeding at the rock face on the Wildlife Trust land for some five minutes. It then flew to the summit of the cliff and out of view. It had been five years since he last saw one on Rowley Hill.

Other wildlife sightings on Portway Hill included Andrew Cook's sighting of a Hummingbird Hawkmoth feeding from bramble flowers on 20<sup>th</sup> June, with the 24<sup>th</sup> providing a record of a solitary Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, only the tenth record for this colourful orchid in the whole of Birmingham and Black Country. With a mainly southerly distribution, with temperatures on the rise in the UK, it appears to be extending northwards. Apparently, it is one of the most successful orchid species on roadside verges, quarries, and other disturbed habitats (photo overleaf).



Left: Pyramidal Orchid (photo M. Poulton) Right: Small Copper (photo M. Bloxham)

Insects seen included Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*, Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*, and Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphylus* were seen in good numbers, and other notable butterflies recorded were Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*, Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*, Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*, Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*, Mother Shipton *Callistegi mi*, and in July, many Six-belted Clearwing moths *Bembecia ichneumoniformis* which were attracted to pheromones. On one occasion a Buff Tip moth *Phalera bucephala* caterpillar was found wandering across the path.



Left: Herald moths in hibernation

Right: Buff Tip caterpillar on site

Both photographs by Mike Poulton

In early September, eight Herald Moths *Scoliopteryx libatrix* were found hibernating in the old MEB building on Portway Hill, and two micro-moths *Agonopterix arenella* and Common Plume *Emmelina monodactyla*, previously not recorded on the hillside, were discovered while clearing bramble and hawthorn on a volunteering day with the Wildlife Trust.



Left: fire site in October

Right: Common Toadflax on fire site

Photographs by Mike Poulton

In early October new growth had already appeared on the site where the fire in July had taken place. Along with new bramble shoots were thousands of Common Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris* plants, many in full flower. The wet autumn of 2022 provided a fungal bonanza, with numerous colourful fruiting bodies appearing everywhere. Shown here is a small sample seen on walks across the hillside during October and November.



**The list of the photographs at the bottom of the previous page is given here:**

Parrot Waxcap (upper left). ‘Dog Sick’ slime mould (upper right). Scarlet Waxcap  
*Hygrocybe coccinea* (lower left) and Yellow Brain *Tremella mesenterica* ( lower right).



*Mike Poulton's usual informative contribution about the Rowley Site concludes the main section of our reports and detailed descriptions of Sandwell flora and fauna. I owe an apology to authors and readers because my own contributions and additions to the work have been much heavier than usual. I considered this necessary to clarify and in certain cases, to expand information so it meant a little more to you. Inordinately long tables/ species lists make for a difficult read without a little embroidery.*

*I am extremely sorry that we are unable to bring you any substantial report on matters in the Sandwell Valley. We are all aware that seismic changes have occurred to the landscape in the river Tame area. A new cycling complex is unfolding on the old Hilltop Golf Course and in Jubilee Coal Tip woodlands and no communications with managers has been possible with regard to wildlife conservation or the many changes in land use on the old farmlands and associated buildings in the Valley.*

**I would appeal to members to pursue this matter, because the next annual report ought really to address this, if we are to remain true to our original constitutional focus on events in the Valley.**

*We are now all aware of the most unfortunate loss of the Newsletter . It was such a valuable addition. Until it is reinstated in some form, Mike Poulton has gladly agreed to keep you informed about our meetings. Here are two meeting reports that would normally have been included in the latest newsletter.*

## **Meeting Report (February 1<sup>st</sup> 2023)**

### **Problems with modern education ( Richard Orton)**

I spent most of my working life involved with education, firstly at a field centre and later in sixth-form colleges. At Christmas 2021, I retired. I did so at the earliest opportunity for a variety of reasons. Firstly the well-documented levels of stress and exhaustion paid a very large part, but there was a deeper malaise which gnawed at the soul. Education no longer happens in schools, (or at least not sixth-form colleges). What we do is train students to pass exams. If it's not on the syllabus, it is not 'important'! This is the view of not only college managers, but also of the students themselves.

As a naturalist / environmentalist I found this incredibly frustrating and the ecological components of the specification occupy about two weeks of teaching in a two year course! Taxonomy, on which all environmental monitoring relies, has an allocation of about an hour - if the teacher is keen (most are not). If the students are doing a vocational course, there is nothing (the emphasis is on biomedical science).

The students should have a grounding in basic natural history at Key Stages 1 – 4, but this is often taught by non-specialist teachers, (not even scientists), and is frequently skimmed over. Another barrier was that the majority of our students commuted from inner-city Birmingham and were of ethnic-minority backgrounds. They do not have the cultural hinterland (and why should they), which means that they are unlikely to be familiar with oak trees and newts. I saw it as part of my remit to try to broaden their experience, and some times it worked spectacularly. But the opportunities became less and less frequent as teaching time was continually squeezed.

The final straw came with the redevelopment of the “Arts Garden”. This was a small area of flower beds and seats with a range of colourful nectar-rich flowers and berry-bearing bushes. It had become a bit overgrown and messy. Without any consultation, (and bearing in mind current media interest in the disconnect between nature and ourselves), the College renovated the garden and replaced it with something which is 95% paving slabs, lined with yew hedges (poisonous) and decorated with plastic trees. I could not understand how an organisation that pays lip-service to holistic education and the need to prepare its students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century could be so crass. Time to go!

### **Invasive species (Mike Bloxham)**

This component of the evening’s entertainment followed Richard’s review of educational matters. Unfortunately it did not do a great deal to raise morale, because the audience was treated to a visual parade involving a collection of creatures that have quietly (sometimes noisily) infiltrated our daily lives. Green Parakeets flew across the screen and greasy kitchen pest moths were sighted on the wall, having quietly taking advantage of breeding in fragments of discarded flour etc.

This was not great news and neither was the report from Chris and Brenda Bird that a new giant bug had been discovered in their house (no passport of course). The mood lifted when the lovely Rosemary Beetle came into view (all shining green with crimson stripes). Things did not improve however when the red Lily Beetle got a mention and went from bad to worse when the Box Moth became the topic of conversation. No-one was pleased to hear about the long - legged spider *Pholcus phalangioides*, now found in so many of Britain’s bathrooms. It became evident that this parade of baddies was not entirely what the audience really needed at this juncture on what had been a sobering night.

I think the next meeting is about Flora.....maybe we shall get some really fascinating revelations....?!



# launch of the new Flora of Sutton Park

The RSPB version on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2023

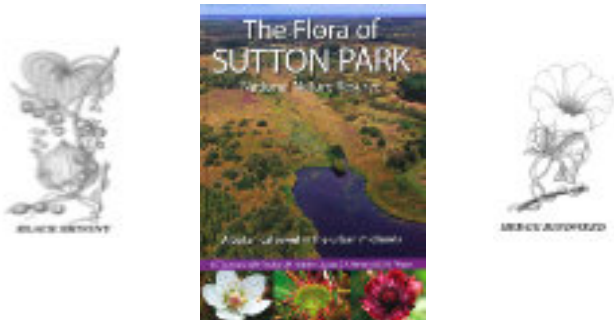


**Mike Poulton, Shirley Hancock, Ian Trueman and Andy Purcell**

This was a most enjoyable event and demonstrated the valuable part a number of our members play in researching the wildlife of Birmingham and the Black Country. Ian Trueman gave a delightful introductory talk, highlighting some of the special features of the Park and floral items of local and national interest.

The evening concluded with a plenary session when a good deal of additional information came to light. New copies of the Flora at a discounted price were available and sales were brisk. The four co-authors soon found themselves signing copies and a most satisfactory meeting (with some 40 present) eventually ended at about 9pm.

A full launch was to take place in Sutton Park later - again well attended, only on that occasion all the authors were present.



Finally- Andy Purcell is very disappointed that no-one has sent him any MAMMAL records !!! We all apologise about this, but have to admit we have submitted no amphibian records either. As an excuse, we shall have to remind him that the freshwater survey is currently mothballed. It will be in action again soon and you are reminded that part one of the survey 'Dragonflies of the Sandwell Valley' is scheduled to be with you later this year. It should be special. Richard Orton has produced a working manuscript and Andy is sorting out the best Photographs.

## Acknowledgements

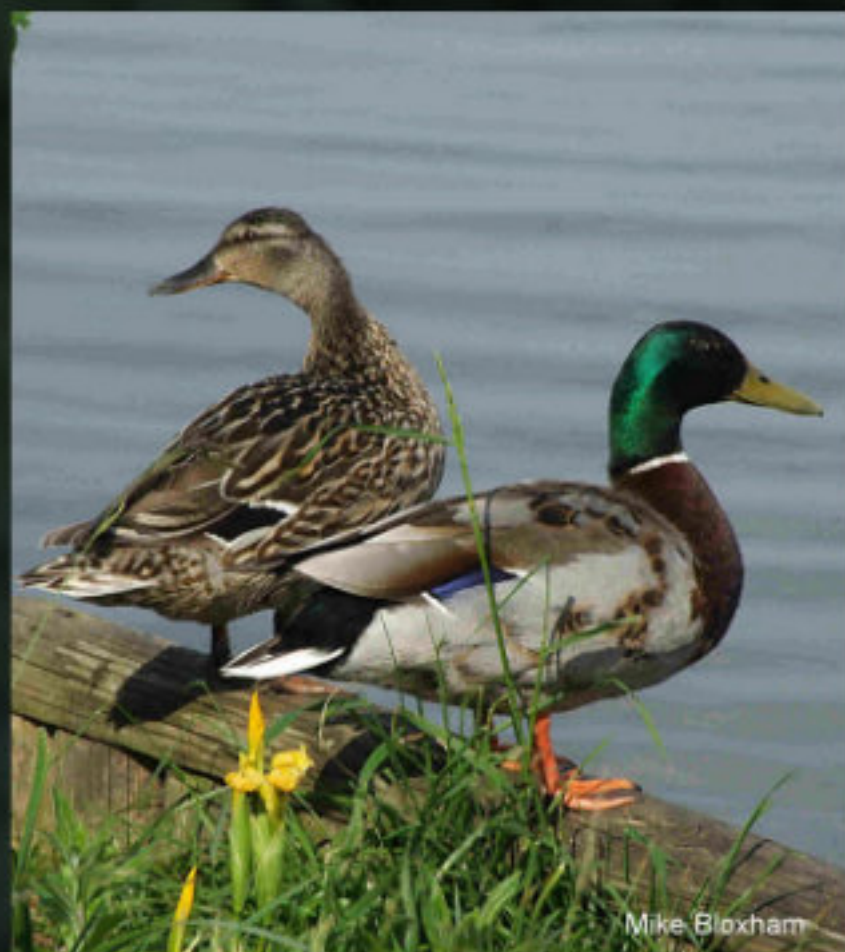
Thanks go to all contributors. I am most grateful to Richard Orton who has collaborated on a number of matters during preparation and corrected errors. The edition has proved to be 'difficult'. Many lists have been encountered and I have to apologise in advance for errors that almost certainly still exist. Thanks go to Cathy Taylor for the RSPB report and to the usual covey of birders:

:Richard Baker, Roger Burns, John Clarke, Mark Dickinson, Mathew Fletcher, Pete Forbes, Vicky Gurney, Pete Hackett, Oliver Hague, Matt Hadlington, Steve Hextell, Tim Hextell, Clive Higgins, Mike Ixer, Hughie King, Catherine Knowles, Steve Lilly, Gareth Marlow, Mike Nicklin, Eric Norman, Rob Preston, Craig Reed, Steve Roper, Dave Saunders, Tracy Saunders, Pam Thompson, Dave Waite and Craig Whitelaw.

Thanks are also extended to Mike Poulton, who never fails to provide copy whenever it is required and to Tony Wood, who has probably submitted one of the largest record sets we have ever encountered.

Finally, a word of praise has to be given to Tulleys Print Ltd. (Halesowen). The company has handled our work for over 14 years and has always treated our business with sensitivity and efficiency. Our first published bulletin cover is seen below.





Mallard on Swan Pool