



*Sandnats*



Cascade Lake (Priory Wood in Sandwell Valley)

# ANNUAL REPORT MARCH 2024

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# VOLUME 46 No. 1 MARCH 2024

Sandwell Valley Naturalists' Club (SANDNATS) was formed in 1975. Its members work to conserve Sandwell's wildlife, help others to enjoy it and collaborate with Sandwell 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 Sandwell Valley RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts.

## OFFICERS

- **PRESIDENT:** Peter Shirley MBE
- **CHAIR:** Val Edkins
- **TREASURER:** Sandra Wood
- **SECRETARY:** Gillian Barnard
- **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**  
**Chris Bird, Richard Orton, Mick Shillam & John Watson**
- **EX OFFICIO MEMBERS:**  
**Bejohn Quigley (Site Manager RSPB)**  
**Sandwell Valley Country Park Representative.**
- **MEMBERSHIP:** Hazel Bloxham
- **BULLETIN EDITOR:** Mike Bloxham. (0121 553 3070)
- **WEBSITE:** Clare Hinchliffe ([sandnats.org.uk](http://sandnats.org.uk))

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(Provisional)	



## The Accounts

### The Sandwell Valley Naturalists Statement of Income and Expenditure for the Year To 31st December 2023

<b><u>INCOME</u></b>		<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
Membership & Visitors		454	-
Donations		0	40
Sundry Receipts			
Refreshments	62		
Raffles	234	296	59
Bank Interest		59	11
Publications			
Back Copies of old publications	NHBS	10	-
Bird Group		45	15
John Shripton's Gift in Will			1000
Margaret's Garden Party			-
Fund Raising		192	211
Christmas Bug Hut/Auction			-
		<b>1056</b>	<b>1336</b>
<b><u>EXPENDITURE</u></b>			
Room Rental		350	150
Printing, Stationery & Postage		394	369
BTCV-Membership & Insurance		219	-
Wildlife Trust Fee		30	30
Donation Unclly's Farm		50	
Holy Trinity School		400	400
Cancelled Garden Party		28	103
Leaflets		112	100
Web Site		36	55
		<b>1619</b>	<b>1207</b>
<u>Excess of Expenditure over income</u>		<b>-563</b>	<b>129</b>
<u>for the Year 2023</u>			

**The Sandwell Valley Naturalists**

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**CASH ACCOUNT**

**BALANCE AS AT 31st DECEMBER  
2022**

REPRESENTED BY:

National Westminster Current Account 1998.37

National Westminster Reserve Account 4872.03

**Less** Excess of Expenditure over income -563.06

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**£6,307.34**

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**BALANCE AS AT 31st DECEMBER  
2023**

REPRESENTED BY:

National Westminster Current Account 1376.43

National Westminster Reserve Account 4930.91

**£6,307.34**

I have prepared this statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31st December 2023 from books and records maintained, information supplied and explanations given and certify that it is in accordance therewith.

Mr John Adkinson

**The Reports on our activities**

At this juncture, readers are reminded that the material included will usually be concerned with recording biodiversity, ecology and associated phenomena in the Sandwell area, but material of special interest from Birmingham and the Black Country will also receive sympathetic consideration. The celebration of citizen science is of great importance, so new writers are always welcome, and editors will usually go out of their way to mentor those who feel they need assistance in preparation of their first article. In general, items of up to 500 words with associated pictures (jpegs at 500 dpi) might be suitable initial targets (experienced and regular writers receive special consideration). The font is Times New Roman 10. Common names should be capitalised (Robin). And scientific names should be *italicised*. Whilst every effort is made to credit photography and associated art works, this is not always easy. Photographs in articles are assumed to have been taken by the author, except where alternative attribution is available. Please inform the editor of errors in this matter.

## **From our Membership Secretary (Hazel Bloxham)**

The cost of membership has continued to remain stable, at £22 for a family and £12 for a single membership. As the society made a loss last year perhaps, in view of inflation, the committee should discuss a modest increase.

A few of our long-term members are sadly now unable to participate personally but enjoy receiving publications by email. They are classed as honorary members and are not required to pay a subscription. An increasing number are paying on-line, but many of us still like to use cash or cheques. We shall therefore continue with both methods.

The number having paid their 2024 subscription stands at 20 single and six family ones.

Many thanks to them all.

## **Fundraising from Chris and Brenda Bird**

‘Sandnats’ was booked to participate in six fundraising and information events during 2023. Due to a combination of illness and holidays, it was only possible to take part in three of these. Whilst Sandnats remains in a very sound financial position, this could quickly change as costs continue to rise.

Members can help by assisting at events. We have a very small team of fundraisers which needs to increase so we do not have to cancel events when someone is unable to participate.

The three events (‘Greenman’, Chasewater Charities Day and Lightwoods Park Open Day) raised £200. Had we been able to cover all the events, this figure could have been doubled.

These events are important for additional reasons such as attracting new members, educating and informing people about the wildlife of the Valley and surrounding areas and also conveying the Valley’s importance for health and mental well-being. Sandnats has been in existence for over 45 years, yet there are plenty of people who have not heard of us or the records we have accumulated.

So far one event has been booked for 2024, this being Lightwoods Craft Day on February 25<sup>th</sup>.



Val Edkins stands ready by our displays before Lightwoods Park Open Day

## Editorial

It is worth reminding readers that although the content of this number comes in a bulletin dated year 2024, the bulk of it is recording the happenings of 2023. As some of you will have noted, in today's world it is quite easy to become confused over such matters, such is the endless deluge of instant digital information swilling around us \*. A journey on the West Midlands Metro will see one surrounded by passengers staring into expensive iphones and with a variety of devices receiving input adorning their persons. This is apparently an aspect of the New Normal and those noting it belong to a contingent assigned to history. The carriage is a sort of bubble with windows of value to few, save when arrival at a destination is imminent. The embankments with their adornment of rampant vegetation intermingled with scraps of plastic and associated windblown garbage attract no attention to all, save the unconverted few, who might sense the unseen wildlife panorama unfolding there.

Holy Trinity Church of England Primary school (recipients of John Shrimpton's bursary) lies behind the metro station of that name and is separated from it and the adjoining embankments by a single robust security fence. Significantly there is sufficient space beneath and between bars to enable some mammalian exchange and furry visitors will discover a school hedge within and then an extensive playing field with substantial wild margins. Already, the caretaker (a wildlife enthusiast) has discovered Hedgehogs on site and was delighted to receive one of Andy's Hedgehog boxes, which will hopefully be occupied soon. Three nest boxes have just been delivered by Mick Shillam and John Watson also helped him in planting oak saplings. Richard Orton checked out the new pond for other wildlife. The Committee is divided regarding the continuing commitment to supporting our wildlife initiative here. Another school might be a worthy recipient of the next award. The idea that we might extend our commitment has its own attractions. On the other hand a second year of support might well enhance and embed the interest in nature conservation – if children see consistency, it is more likely that the nurtured seed of care for our environment may develop to yield more sensitive citizens for tomorrow.

The ecological achievements of many members have been remarkable and each year their findings are helping us to sense the origins and establishment of local wildlife, with many clues to suggest that nature is indeed able both to cloak with beauty the worst remnants of mankind's activities and reveal our hubris in imagining we can control it. There is now a mature coniferous plantation where the giant Jubilee Tip once stood. Numerous new organisms have successfully adapted to life in Britain, having found many ways to get here. Casual exotic garden escapes plus a plethora of other incomers can now thrive as evolving weather patterns and climatic conditions begin to favour them, rather than some indigenous plants and animals. The bulletin contains a substantial section about our older woodlands. These remain an ecological constant in the midst of much else that changes and are very seriously under-rated. They have been central to a great deal of wildlife attention over the years and have proved to be a most valuable reservoir of Sandwell's biodiversity. Many experienced and notable ecologists have helped us to draw up information about them and this knowledge has been available for a long period of time.

I would like to remind all readers that the meeting reports for 2023 plus any *associated lists for the day*, will have been published in the Newsletter. Digital copy of these is retained by the Editor (Jenni Wilding) and by me as Bulletin Editor (and currently as Archivist). The Newsletter may also contain observations (e.g. accounts of the activity of a bird in your garden), but in general, longer items *indicating a more extended period of study* will find their way into the Bulletin. Please consider writing something for it. Gillian Barnard is having her first short study included in this number, so she gets special thanks. Someone out there probably has a string of observations gathered over quite a long period that might well qualify for publication and give someone data of special resonance for them. Tony Wood's remarkable set of Lepidoptera records with Richard Orton's commentary sets the current record for longer articles in one edition by an individual and the one I have contributed here is, I am afraid, a pretty tough read!

**In concluding I must give warmest thanks to all the writers and photographers who have contributed to this edition. Special thanks go to Peter Shirley for spending much time proofreading for us. Apologies are offered for residual errors in presentation for which the Editor must take full responsibility. We continue to be indebted to Claire Hinchliffe for her long service in managing our valuable website.**

*\*'In responding to the wrath of an offended Mother Nature, mankind should never overlook the insidious advance of other encroaching evils - most notably that of digital slavery.'*

## President's Ponderings

There are six years left to achieve the Government's target that 30% of the UK's land and seas should be protected and conserved for biodiversity. This is a wonderful aspiration, linked to the United Nation's target for the whole planet. Unfortunately, that is likely to be what it remains – always the aspiration, never the achievement. According to Natural England currently only 8.5% of England has even been mapped in relation to the target. The foundation for measuring progress is designated sites (Natura 2000, SSSIs, National Nature Reserves, and woodland which qualifies for inclusion in 'Other Effective Area Based Conservation Measures'). As always, good intentions towards nature and wildlife are clothed in impenetrable bureaucratic language. Wildlife and Countryside Link, the umbrella body for the UK's nature conservation movement, estimated in its latest 30 x 30 Annual Progress Report, published in September 2023, that just over 3% of England's land and 8% of its seas is protected for nature. Meanwhile the most recent State of Nature report, also published in September 2023, makes grim reading. A 20% decline since 1970 of the 10,000 species studied, one in six of them at risk of extinction, and 151 plants and animals becoming extinct since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. (I think that the last statistic is cause for optimism, an average of only one species becoming extinct every three years or so.)

The State of Nature Report is produced every three years by an alliance of more than 60 major nature NGOs, research institutes and Government agencies. They are backed up by an army of citizen scientists, continuing the tradition of amateur recording, something SVNC members excel at. Those citizen scientists submit thousands of observations every year through many recording schemes. These include Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count, the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch, and the Woodland Trust's Nature's Calendar. In addition, on-line apps, such as iRecord and iNaturalist, help to capture day to day observations.

Nature's plight is not helped by developments in the agricultural landscape where farmers wield enormous influence over their local wildlife and its habitats. Conservation measures which came through the financial support given to farmers through the EU Common Agricultural Policy included cross-compliance. Since 2005 this required farmers and landowners to manage hedgerows to help wildlife by, for example, avoiding flailing and trimming them during the birds' breeding season. At the end of 2024, as a result of Brexit, those EU rules were outlawed here without anything replacing them. It is a similar story in relation to protecting soils and watercourses. In theory hedgerows can now be trashed with impunity at any time of the year.

At the same time farmers all over Europe, including strangely here in Britain considering we have left the EU, are protesting about cheap imports and the nature-friendly restrictions placed upon them in relation to mitigating climate change and moving towards net-zero. Always happy to accept public funding to support their industry farmers are less keen on that funding having environmental conditions attached. I heard a French farmer say something like: 'They are trying to tell us when we can and cannot trim our hedges'.

Faced with all this you might think that the Government would be stepping up its efforts to help nature and reverse the worrying trends, but that does not seem to be the case. Despite all the rhetoric and promises the scale of the response nowhere near matches the scale of the problem.

It would be interesting here in Sandwell to try to map and compare the percentage of land which is protected in some way from damaging development and other activities. With substantial open areas such as the Sandwell Valley and the Rowley Hills, and formal designations including Green Belt, and Local Nature Reserves, could we be above the national average of 3%? Whether we are or not (and I suspect not) 2024 is a year of opportunity to raise the profile of the need to make greater efforts to conserve nature for its own sake and for the benefit of people. As well as the local elections in May there will be a general election. The Wildlife Trusts' Head of Public Affairs Elliot Chapman-Jones says '*With an election on the horizon and political parties busy drafting the manifestos they will present to the public, now is the time for them to finally set out a vision for brighter future. (With) the UK committed to 2030 targets to halt nature's decline and protect 30% of land and sea, the next government will have to do the bulk of the work*'.

This presents opportunities to engage those who would govern us in dialogue about the role of the natural world in our lives and in helping to meet the challenges of climate change. We must never take things for granted, radical changes do take place, witness the closing of Hill Top golf course and the construction of the new flood control dam.

Fortunately, SVNC seems to be in good shape to meet challenges, whether through ecological surveying and recording to inform decision-making, or engaging with local authority officers and others in discussions about future policies and work programmes. Despite what the Wildlife Trusts say, achieving ambitious targets needs bottom-up as well as top-down actions. The Government and the United Nations won't notice, but we are doing our bit towards 30 x 30.

## **From Sandwell Valley RSPB**

2023 saw many notable happenings at the Centre. Late in the year we were delighted to welcome a new Site Manager and warmly congratulate Cathy Taylor on her departure to take up a new post at Cannock.

### **An extract from Cathy's farewell to us all.**

'When I returned to RSPB Sandwell Valley over 8 years ago as Site Manager, it was my dream job. I was excited to learn about all the wildlife of the site and help it thrive. What came as a wonderful surprise was the level of incredible dedication and knowledge in the team. I have learned so much and the most valuable knowledge I take with me is from the people I have worked with - volunteers and staff.'

Over the last 8 years I've seen the site succeed in visitor numbers, school visits, community engagement and volunteer support. The habitats and gardens have developed. The island landscaping was the most fun project and seeing waders using the new shallow areas between the islands is still thrilling. It has been interesting to move the site forward by trialling ways of overcoming issues such as scraping the *Crassula* from the marsh and using canes on the islands to try to deter avian predators.

My favourite wildlife moments from the nature reserve include seeing the swifts peering out of the nesting bricks, watching the bee bank and boxes come to life every spring, hearing Tawny Owls hooting in the car park on winter evenings and wobbling the Jelly Ear fungi on the Elders. Seeing children (and parents/teachers) get excited about pond dipping discoveries has also provided many of my favourite moments.

It's time for me to move on to a bigger (1000 hectares bigger!) challenge. I will be back to visit and I hope you will be coming up to Cannock Chase on a trip sometime. I know you will all continue to take the RSPB Sandwell Valley forward from strength to strength.'

*Sandnats also registers its appreciation of Cathy's management at our RSPB. The relationship was warm and staff covering our regular meetings (often Cathy herself) permitted a flexibility of schedule which often enabled special meetings to carry on for a while whilst valuable conversations were concluded. It is hard to recall any occasion when the Centre failed to remember one of our booked engagements.*

*There was a happy interrelationship between staff, interns and our local colleges and universities which opened the door for many to engage seriously with wildlife conservation and some to make significant progress towards being ecological champions of the future. We liked the lovely smile and know that it will be appreciated at Cannock. (Editor).*

### **From our new Site Manager Bejohn Quigley**

As the new Site Manager for RSPB Sandwell Valley, I am deeply honoured to join this vibrant community. Your dedication and knowledge of the preservation and enhancement of our wetland ecosystem have been inspiring from the outset. I am passionate about environmental sustainability, ensuring knowledge and ecosystems are available for future generations. With an education in wildlife conservation and ecology, and a background in diverse team management and community engagement, I am eager to collaborate with stakeholders to ensure the long-term health and vitality of our Forge Mill Lake wetland ecosystem.

My vision is to facilitate the cultivation of a thriving, diverse resilient ecosystem that serves as a beacon of community stewardship and engagement. I hope to be focusing on community collaboration, fostering partnerships with local education facilities, businesses, and community organisations, with the aim of

deepening community connections and instilling a further sense of pride and understanding of our shared natural heritage.

I am hoping to connect with the local community to enable RSPB Sandwell Valley to be a platform for the diverse value of green space and wetland ecosystems in urban environments. I am looking forward to developing a community informed and focused five-year management plan, to facilitate a harmonious ecosystem where native biodiversity thrives for the benefit of all.

Thank you all for your warm welcome, I truly look forward to working with you all to develop a vibrant, biodiverse wetland ecosystem.

Bejohn Quigley



**Cathy Taylor (farewell -with all our best wishes) . Bejohn Quigley (welcome - with all our best wishes).**

### **From Learning Officer Lucy Fleming**

It's been a fantastic year for schools on Reserves at RSPB Sandwell Valley. From April 2023 to end of March 2024 we've welcomed 3,594 primary school children and their teachers to the site to take part in a range of outdoor learning sessions. Our target was to engage between 2,000 and 2,500 children so we've exceeded the top end of this bracket by over 1,500 children. Of the ten programmes we offer, *Discovering Pond Minibeasts* (pond dipping) and *Living Things and Their Habitats* (a trail around the site) were the most popular activities for the seven to 11 year-olds. For younger children (4-7 years old) land and pond minibeast themed activities had the most bookings.

We've had some lovely feedback from teachers. A teacher from Ferndale Primary School said, "We have loved our visit. Catered wonderfully for all our children! Thank you for having us, the children really enjoyed it." A member of staff from St. John Bosco Catholic Primary School stated, "Thank you for a lovely day, full of engaging activities. Super science learning outside the classroom."

*Ongoing brilliant service to education and our Sandwell Community by the entire staff at RSPB (Editor)*

## Sandwell Valley Ornithology: Report from the Independent Bird Group (2023).

### Monthly Occurrence of Species

This might help you to see where your chosen bird may be found in the report and to note any abnormalities of occurrence (e.g. migration patterns /unusual seasonal residency and signs of genuine new residency). The set of birds varies from year to year and may depend on preferences decided within the birding groups, so you may wish to contact them with regard to that and other related matters. The Group works independently, but also liaises with our RSPB.

The completed monthly reports follow this table. A map of locations with some grid references is in the appendix.

Bird	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Arctic Tern				■								
Barnacle Goose	■											■
Blackcap	■	■	■							■		■
Black-necked Grebe			■									
Brambling		■	■							■	■	
Cattle Egret									■			
Cetti's Warbler					■	■						
Chiffchaff		■	■									■
Collared Dove											■	
Common Gull	■	■	■			■		■		■	■	
Common Sandpiper				■	■		■	■	■			
Common Scoter							■	■				
Common Tern				■		■	■					
Crossbill							■		■			
Curlew				■			■	■				
Cuckoo					■	■	■					
Dunlin										■		
Egyptian Goose	■		■									
Fieldfare	■	■								■		
Firecrest	■											
Garden Warbler				■								
Golden Plover										■	■	
Goosander							■					
Goshawk			■	■	■							
Grasshopper Warbler				■	■							
Great Bl.-backed Gull	■									■		■
Great White Egret				■	■			■	■		■	■
Green Sandpiper				■	■		■	■	■			
Greenfinch		■								■	■	
Grey Phalarope									■	■		
Hobby					■	■	■	■	■	■		
House Martin			■	■								
Jack Snipe	■	■										
Kittiwake			■									■
Kestrel	■											
Lesser Whitethroat				■					■			
Linnet												■
Little Egret				■		■						
Little Gull				■								
Little Ringed Plover			■	■	■	■						

The Curlew is only an occasional visitor to the valley. It prefers wide open wild spaces without humans!



Bird	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Mandarin Duck												
Marsh Harrier												
Meadow Pipit												
Mediterranean Gull												
Mute Swan												
Oystercatcher												
Peregrine												
Pheasant												
Pink-footed Goose												
Pintail												
Pochard												
Raven												
Red-crested Pochard												
Red-legged Partridge												
Red-head Smew												
Red Kite												
Redshank												
Redstart												
Redwing												
Reed Warbler												
Ring Ouzel												
Ringed Plover												
Rock Pipit												
Sand Martin												
Sedge Warbler												
Shelduck												
Shoveler												
Siskin												
Skylark												
Spotted Flycatcher												
Spotted Redshank												
Stonechat												
Swallow												
Swift												
Tawny Owl												
Teal												
Tree Pipit												
Tufted Duck												
Water Rail												
Waxwing												
Wheatear												
Whinchat												
White-fronted Goose												
Whitethroat												
Whooper Swan												
Wigeon												
Willow Warbler												
Wood Warbler												
Woodcock												
Yellow Wagtail												
Yellowhammer												
Yellow-legged Gull												

Birds people feed



Tufted Ducks seem to be present on all our larger pools and whenever humans arrive at the water margin with a bag, they join the Mallards and Canada Geese to see what is on offer. The Great-crested Grebe keeps its distance!



Drawings by the late Terry Parker.

## January

The month got off to a good start with sixty-six species seen on New Year's Day, the main highlight being a Woodcock in the Legion Field. The 2<sup>nd</sup> saw a Jack Snipe on the RSPB island, Peregrine on the pylons, Red Kite over Hill Top, Tawny Owl and a male Blackcap in a garden inside the recording area. The 3<sup>rd</sup> saw a Great Black-backed Gull over Monks Meadow, a Common Gull on Swan Pool and three Barnacle Geese were at the golf course on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Two Egyptian Geese at Ice house Lake on this date provided only our fifth Valley record and two Linnet were also noted near the sink hole at Salter's Lane.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> a Great Black-backed Gull was at Forge Mill Lake, with the 9<sup>th</sup> seeing two Raven over Salter's Lane, while the 10<sup>th</sup> gave an adult Yellow-legged Gull on Swan Pool. The 13<sup>th</sup> saw our first Fieldfare of the year with a single near Forge Mill Lake. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Peregrines were sighted over Forge Mill Lake and the following day, one was noticed over Monks Meadow. On the 17<sup>th</sup> a Pheasant flew over Forge Lane, a Kestrel and Skylark being seen on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> saw a Firecrest on the Reserve and on the following day, an adult Yellow-legged Gull was sighted on Swan Pool and four Ravens were over Forge Mill Lake. The 24<sup>th</sup> provided a new record count of Siskin, with 70 birds in the alders around Forge Mill Lake, the 25<sup>th</sup> providing a sighting of a pair of Pintail on Swan Pool. The 29<sup>th</sup> saw our first Oystercatcher of the year and a Red Kite over Salter's Lane. Finally, on the following day, a pair of Tawny Owl was calling in a garden in the recording area.

## February

The month started with two Oystercatchers on the Reserve, the next day seeing a male Blackcap in the Barns at Forge Mill Farm. On the 4<sup>th</sup> a Skylark was singing near the Crematorium and the 6<sup>th</sup> saw two Ravens over Hill Top. The tenth gave the first Meadow Pipits of the year, with 16 on Brown's fields and a Jack Snipe at the same location. On the twelfth two pairs of Oystercatchers were back in the Valley and over 40 Greenfinches were counted.

Two Ravens over the Reserve and a Chiffchaff were recorded on the 15<sup>th</sup>. On the following day a Red Kite was over Brown's fields, an adult Yellow-legged Gull was seen on Swan Pool, four Ravens were over the Reserve and two Common Gulls were on the island, one being the Oslo ringed bird. The 17<sup>th</sup> saw a male Brambling under the feeding station at the RSPB - still present at the month's end - with two Skylarks near the Crematorium. On the following day three female Stonechats were at Brown's fields.

February 21<sup>st</sup> saw over 60 Fieldfares near Forge Mill Farm, this being the best count so far. The 23<sup>rd</sup> provided a Stonechat record at Salters Lane, with one the following day at Swan Pool meadow. The 26<sup>th</sup> saw the Stonechat still in Swan Pool meadow with the following day seeing a Red Kite fly over the motorway towards Brown's Fields and also a female Stonechat at Salter's Lane. The last day of the month saw a Red Kite again over Brown's fields, with Stonechat still at Salter's Lane and a Jack Snipe in the marsh.

## March

March started with the female Stonechat still in the scrub area Swan Pool and the Brambling was still present. The 2<sup>nd</sup> saw a male Stonechat in the field opposite Forge Mill car park. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> a pair of Stonechat and a Peregrine were at Salter's Lane. On the following day, a low-flying female Goshawk was seen travelling northwards over Legion field, the Brambling was still present, and a Red Kite was near the Crematorium. On the 5<sup>th</sup> a Tawny Owl was calling in a garden in the recording area and on the following day two female Stonechats were in Swan Pool meadow.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> a Yellow-legged Gull and Common Gull were on Swan Pool. The 11<sup>th</sup> saw a first winter male Stonechat at Swan Pool meadow and a Brambling at the RSPB feeders. The next day a Goshawk flew over the Legion field and later was seen over the reserve. On the 13<sup>th</sup> a juvenile Kittiwake was at Forge Mill Lake, and we recorded our first returning Chiffchaff. Two male Stonechats were at Salter's Lane, one at the marsh and four Sand Martins were observed over Forge Mill on the 15<sup>th</sup>, the next day providing us with a record of the first returning Little Ringed Plover.

March 17<sup>th</sup> saw three Stonechats and the first Wheatears appeared, with two males at Salter's Lane. A pair of Stonechat was at the marsh and a second winter Mediterranean Gull was recorded by Forge Mill Lake slipway.

The next day found the Stonechat and Wheatear still at Salter's Lane, with over 20 Meadow Pipits. An Egyptian Goose was on Forge Mill and the first Swallow of the year was reported. The 19<sup>th</sup> saw three Wheatears at Salter's Lane, while the 21<sup>st</sup> gave us the first House Martin of the year and a male Stonechat on the bund. The following day saw three Wheatears at Salter's Lane and on the 24<sup>th</sup> some 12 Chiffchaff were reported around Forge Mill Lake, together with about seven Sand Martins. The 25<sup>th</sup> found Wheatear still at Salter's Lane, the 27<sup>th</sup> providing a fine record of two Black-necked Grebes on Swan Pool, the first since September 2002. A Stonechat was also present. The first migrant Blackcap appeared on the following day, the Stonechat still being present near Swan Pool. The 29<sup>th</sup> saw the first returning Willow Warblers, female Brambling and the Stonechat still being at the feeders. On the 30<sup>th</sup> a male Wheatear was reported at Salter's Lane and over 20 Sand Martins were counted at Swan Pool.

## April

April started with nine Little Egrets, seven at Forge Mill Farm and two on Forge Mill Lake. The 4<sup>th</sup> saw two Wheatears and the first Redstart of the year (a male) at Salter's Lane. On the 5<sup>th</sup> a female Ring Ouzel was at Salter's Lane and six Skylarks were near the crematorium. On the next day the Ring Ouzel was still present with both the Wheatear and the first Yellow Wagtail of the year being sighted. The 9<sup>th</sup> saw a Redshank on the Reserve, still present on the 10<sup>th</sup> which also saw the first Common Sandpiper of the year, with one on the river.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> a Spotted Redshank flew over Forge Mill Lake. Later two 'shank' species were flushed, but only seen briefly. The first Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler was recorded, a Great White Egret was over Dartmouth Park and four Wheatears were at Salter's Lane. The 12<sup>th</sup> saw a male Redstart and a male Wheatear at Salter's Lane. On the 14<sup>th</sup> the first Reed Warbler of the year appeared, the next day finding the Redstart remaining for its fourth day. On the 16<sup>th</sup> a Yellow Wagtail was on the island and four Wheatears were in the Valley. On the next day a Green Sandpiper was on the Reserve and the 18<sup>th</sup> gave records of Garden Warbler, with one at Salter's Lane and a female Goshawk was also seen.

The 19<sup>th</sup> recorded Wheatears in the Valley and a Common Sandpiper on Forge Mill, the following day seeing a pair of Shelduck briefly on Forge Mill Lake and an adult Little Gull on Swan Pool (also briefly) in the afternoon. Our first Swift appeared over Forge Mill Lake on the 21<sup>st</sup> whilst on the next day Grasshopper Warblers were reeling opposite Forge Mill car park with another heard in the Legion Field. On the same day a Wheatear was on the bund, with some eight at Salter's Lane and we recorded our first Whinchat and Lesser Whitethroat of the year.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> proved to be an excellent day for recording. An Arctic Tern was on Swan Pool for five minutes, a female Redstart was at Swan Pool paddocks and a Yellow Wagtail was over Swan Pool Meadow. At Salter's Lane were four Wheatears, two Lesser Whitethroat, three Yellow Wagtails and a possible Ring Ouzel, whilst at Forge Mill Lake, Lesser Whitethroat was noted on the south bank, with Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover at the Lake. Overhead the counts provided in excess of 100 Sand Martins, over fifty House Martins and around 20 Swallows.

April 24<sup>th</sup> saw seven Wheatears, three Whinchats and a Redstart at Salter's Lane, the following day witnessing a Redstart still present at Salter's Lane and two Wheatears. The 26<sup>th</sup> provided records of a Ringed Plover and Curlew over Forge Mill Lake and Redstart, with two Wheatears again at Salter's Lane. On the 27<sup>th</sup> a single Yellow Wagtail was over Forge Mill Lake, the next day seeing three Wheatears near the Pet Cemetery. On the 29<sup>th</sup> a Common Tern was on Swan Pool, a male Ring Ouzel and Yellow Wagtail were at Salter's Lane and a Wheatear was seen on the bund. The final day of the month saw six or seven Whinchat and three Wheatears at Salter's Lane.

## **May**

A quiet month started with a male Whinchat on Brown's fields and Whinchat and Wheatear near the Pet Cemetery (near the Crematorium), with the third seeing three Common Sandpiper on the island. The sixth was the All Day Birdwatch. 82 species were recorded, the highlights being Whinchat, Wheatear and two Water Rails. The 7<sup>th</sup> provided a record of Grasshopper Warbler reeling by the river leading to the Legion Field, Yellow Wagtail and a Great White Egret in flight over Forge Mill Lake.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> a Cuckoo was calling at Hill Top . The 16<sup>th</sup> of May provided sightings of a Red Kite over Salter's Lane and on the 20<sup>th</sup> up to five Cetti's Warblers were reported around Forge Mill Lake. On the following day a male Goshawk was sighted over Salter's Lane. The 26<sup>th</sup> saw a Green Sandpiper at Forge Mill Lake and on the following day a Red Kite was over Salter's Lane. On the 28<sup>th</sup> a Peregrine flew over Forge Mill Lake and two Little Ringed Plovers were present. The 30<sup>th</sup> saw another Red Kite over the Reserve. On the last day of the month a pair of Shoveler appeared on Forge Mill Lake and the first Hobby of the year was recorded over the Golf Course.

## **June**

After a very slow start, the 6<sup>th</sup> saw two Red Kite over Forge Mill Lake and a Ringed Plover on the island, and on the following day a Hobby flew over the RSPB Centre. On the 8<sup>th</sup> a Wood Warbler was at Sot's Hole - the first record since 7<sup>th</sup> May 2007 - while a Hobby and Cuckoo were on the Reserve. The 10<sup>th</sup> saw the first returning Pochard and Teal on Forge Mill Lake and a Cuckoo over the Newton Road. Records for the following day included a Tawny Owl at Sot's Hole, a first- summer Common Gull on the Reserve and a Red Kite over Salter's Lane.

Records on the 13<sup>th</sup> included a Common Tern on the Reserve, while the 15<sup>th</sup> gave a Hobby over Salter's Lane. On the 17<sup>th</sup> a Water Rail with young was seen in the marsh and 12 Little Ringed Plovers were present. On the following day a Red Kite flew over Salter's Lane, while the 19<sup>th</sup> gave the first confirmed breeding of Cetti's Warblers with three young seen in the marsh. On the 20<sup>th</sup> a Red Kite flew over the hide and a Hobby was over the Golf Course. The next day saw an early returning Wigeon, five young Cetti's Warblers, a Yellow Wagtail by the dam and a Red Kite over Salter's Lane.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> a Cuckoo was flying around the marsh and again next day, this time over the Golf Course. On the 25<sup>th</sup> a Red Kite over Salter's Lane was also seen next day. A Red Kite was seen in flight over High Bridges on the 27<sup>th</sup> with the following day providing sightings of a Common Tern on Forge Mill Lake and a Cuckoo near Ray Hall. It was also good to see Little Egrets and Little Ringed Plovers both breeding successfully.

## **July**

July 2<sup>nd</sup> saw a Hobby over Forge Mill Lake, a Pheasant at Forge Mill Farm and two Goosanders back on Forge Mill Lake after being absent in June. The 6<sup>th</sup> saw a Peregrine over Forge Mill Lake, with a Cuckoo calling on the 8<sup>th</sup> near Forge Mill being also heard calling over the Golf Course on the 10<sup>th</sup>. The following day provided

a record of six Common Sandpiper at Forge Mill Lake. The 16<sup>th</sup> saw five Common Sandpipers on Swan Pool, a Curlew was heard flying over and two Common Tern were briefly on Forge Mill Lake. On the 20<sup>th</sup> two Marsh Harriers flew over Forge Mill Lake. The 22<sup>nd</sup> saw the arrival of a male Common Scoter on Forge Mill Lake - still present at the end of the month. On the 26<sup>th</sup> a Crossbill flew over High Bridges, the next day providing records of a Hobby over Forge Mill Lake and a count of 44 young Tufted Duck on Forge Mill Lake and the river. On the last day of the month a Green Sandpiper was at Forge Mill Lake.

## **August**

The Common Scoter was still present for its eleventh day on the first day of August, the 2<sup>nd</sup> giving sightings of three Redshanks and a Green Sandpiper on Forge Mill Lake. The 3<sup>rd</sup> saw two Curlews in flight over Swan Pool. On the 6<sup>th</sup> a Great White Egret was at Forge Mill Lake, the next day gave us a Spotted Flycatcher sighting at Swan Pool paddocks. The 10<sup>th</sup> saw the Scoter finally departing after 19 days and on the next day a Tawny Owl was present.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> a Hobby and Peregrine were in flight over Salter's Lane, the following day seeing a Wheatear at the same site, a Hobby over Forge Mill Lake and a Spotted Flycatcher near Swan Pool meadow. The 16<sup>th</sup> provided the first Tree Pipit of the year with two at Hill Top, plus four Redstarts, some five Spotted Flycatchers and a female Redstart at Salter's Lane. The 17<sup>th</sup> witnessed Red Kite, Hobby and Tree Pipit at Salter's Lane with the 19<sup>th</sup> seeing a Great White Egret dropping in briefly. In addition, a Common Gull and a Redstart were also seen, -plus a Hobby over the hide and three Spotted Flycatchers at Swan Pool paddocks.

August 20<sup>th</sup> found a Wheatear and eight Spotted Flycatchers at Hill Top, Green Sandpiper on the Reserve and a male Redstart at Salter's Lane. On the following day Tree Pipit and Spotted Flycatcher were noted at Hill Top and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> a Spotted Flycatcher was by the river with Green Sandpiper and Tawny Owl also reported. The next day found four Spotted Flycatchers in Swan Pool paddocks.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> a Redstart was at Salter's Lane, Spotted Flycatcher at Hill Top- with a single in the paddocks and three Common Sandpiper and Green Sandpiper were at the Reserve. The next day saw two Green Sandpipers on a small pool near Hill Top, Redstart at Salter's Lane and Paddocks in company with two Spotted Flycatchers at this last site. We experienced a busy day on the 28<sup>th</sup> when we saw female Wheatear, two Redstarts, three Spotted Flycatchers and a Hobby at Salter's Lane and Spotted Flycatcher at Hill Top. The good birding continued the following day with four Redstarts and three Spotted Flycatchers at Hill Top, followed by Wheatear, Tree Pipit, two Spotted Flycatchers and three Redstarts at Salter's Lane and Green Sandpiper on the Reserve.

The 30<sup>th</sup> saw four Spotted Flycatcher and two Redstarts at Hill Top, a male Redstart and Tree Pipit at Salter's Lane and four Spotted Flycatchers in Flycatcher Field. The last day of the month provided records of a Wheatear on the island, Redstart, Wheatear and Spotted Flycatcher at Salter's Lane, a male Redstart at Swan Pool Paddocks and a foray to Hill Top rewarded us with two Tree Pipits, three Meadow Pipits, two Redstarts, Yellow Wagtail, three Spotted Flycatchers and Red Kite. Two Green Sandpipers were on the small pool, later relocating to Forge Mill Lake.

## **September**

The first day saw two Redstart and a Spotted Flycatcher at Salter's Lane, three Spotted Flycatchers in Swan Pool paddocks and at Hill Top, some three Redstart and several Spotted Flycatchers. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> was the All Day Bird Race, 17 birders took to the field and 84 species were recorded, highlights being over five Spotted Flycatchers, two Redstart, Wheatear, Redshank, Green Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper. A list of all the birds recorded can be found at the end of the report.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> a Wheatear was at Salter's Lane and a male Wigeon on Swan Pool. The 6<sup>th</sup> saw a juvenile Marsh Harrier with orange wing tags, a Norfolk bird, fly over the Reserve. The 9<sup>th</sup> saw a male Mandarin on the river, Whinchat and Lesser Whitethroat at Salter's Lane and a steady passage of Meadow Pipits and Siskins. On the 10<sup>th</sup> a calling Crossbill flew over. The 12<sup>th</sup> was a very significant day for us because it gave a first for the Valley, with two Cattle Egrets on the Forge Mill Lake boom for just over an hour.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> a Wheatear was at Swan Pool Meadow, the following day saw Spotted Flycatcher at Swan Pool Paddocks and a Mandarin was noted on the river. The 16<sup>th</sup> saw the Mandarin back on the river, whilst the next day produced two Whinchats and two Stonechats at Salter's Lane. On the 18<sup>th</sup> a Great White Egret was at the Reserve, Pheasant and Yellow Wagtail were at Forge Mill farm and a Whinchat was at Salter's Lane. The next morning saw a Hobby over High Bridges, possibly the same bird seen over Forge Mill Lake later in the day.

The 20<sup>th</sup> was another significant recording day because we recorded the Valley's second Grey Phalarope at Dartmouth Park Boating Pool where it spent eleven days - being photographed by many ornithologists. On the same day a Hobby was seen to take a House Martin over the pool. During the next day a pair of Stonechats was at Salter's Lane, the 23<sup>rd</sup> providing records of a Wheatear in Dartmouth Park, Stonechat near the dam and a movement of Meadow Pipits across the Valley. A Hobby was again over Dartmouth Park on the following day and the 26<sup>th</sup> saw a Rock Pipit in flight over Forge Mill Lake. The 27<sup>th</sup> was another busy birding day with a Mandarin on the Tame Valley Canal, a male Stonechat at the marsh, 72 Meadow Pipits and two Skylarks over Forge Mill and 15 Meadow Pipits and three Skylarks over Hill Top. The 29<sup>th</sup> saw a male Stonechat at Tanhouse meadow (near the Reserve entrance) and four more at Brown's fields. The final day of a significant month closed with the Phalarope still present and two female Stonechats at Swan Pool meadow.

## **October**

The month opened with the Grey Phalarope remaining for its 12<sup>th</sup> day - four Stonechats also being noted at Salter's Lane and the first nine Redwings of the autumn were reported at Forge Mill. The 2<sup>nd</sup> saw a Rock Pipit over Forge Mill and Pheasant at Forge Mill Farm, with the following day seeing the Phalarope (photo p.6) finally move on after a thirteen day stay and a pair of Stonechat was noted in Swan Pool Meadow. The 4<sup>th</sup> saw a Hobby over the RSPB centre. On the 6<sup>th</sup> two juvenile Shelduck were briefly on the Reserve, the 7<sup>th</sup> seeing two Stonechats at Swan Pool meadow. On the 8<sup>th</sup> we recorded 17 Stonechats, a new record count, the previous being eleven in February 2021. On the same day two Tawny Owls were calling by the dam and one near the railway.

The 9<sup>th</sup> saw eight Golden Plover fly through, Great White Egret over Salter's Lane, Whinchat and three Stonechats (also at Salter's Lane) and a movement of Redwing and Fieldfare. Swan Pool also hosted a pair of Stonechat, and a Red Kite flew over. October 10<sup>th</sup> provided records of two male Stonechats at Swan Pool Meadow, two pairs at Salter's Lane and third Rock Pipit of the year on the island. On the 11<sup>th</sup> a single male Stonechat was at Swan Pool Meadow, the 12<sup>th</sup> seeing a remarkable 62 Stonechat in the Valley, breaking the new record set on the 8<sup>th</sup>. This notable day continued with records of two Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Brambling and a Red-crested Pochard.

The 13<sup>th</sup> saw 20 Whooper Swans on Swan Pool at 7.35am - another remarkable event - but they were then flushed by swimmers. The same day saw a male Stonechat on the bund. The 14<sup>th</sup> reported six Stonechats at Swan Pool Meadow and two on the bund, with the 17<sup>th</sup> providing another Rock Pipit record at Swan Pool. The following day saw the first Dunlin of the year on the islands and notably the Oslo Common Gull returned for its fifth year. Two Stonechats were also at Salter's Lane.

The Dunlin was still present until mid-morning on the 19<sup>th</sup>, the Rock Pipit also being briefly seen, with four Stonechats reported at Salter's Lane. The following day saw three Stonechats at Salter's Lane. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> a female Blackcap was at the Reserve, the next day seeing an adult Great Black-backed Gull on Penny Hill Lane paddocks (adjoining Newton Road) and a single Stonechat. The 25<sup>th</sup> saw three Stonechats at Salter's Lane (a favoured location) and an adult Yellow-legged Gull on the Reserve. October 28<sup>th</sup> saw yet another ornithological record count of 61 Mute Swans, observations for the month concluding on the 30<sup>th</sup> with Red Kite seen over Forge Mill Farm and an impressive Greenfinch flock of over 70 birds being reported.

## **November**

The month started with a female Brambling at the RSPB feeders, the 2<sup>nd</sup> seeing a Woodcock over Salter's Lane and two juvenile Shelduck over Forge Mill Lake. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> a Stonechat was by the dam. The following day saw a male Stonechat in the marsh, whilst on the 5<sup>th</sup> a Pintail was seen from the hide and a Mediterranean Gull was at Dartmouth Park Pool. The 6<sup>th</sup> provided an impressive record of a flock consisting of over 100 Greenfinches at the sunflower field at Forge Mill Farm. On the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, a Red Kite flew over the Reserve, the 9<sup>th</sup> also seeing a Stonechat in Swan Pool Meadow.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> some 40 Golden Plovers were recorded over Salter's Lane and a unringed Common Gull appeared on the Reserve. The 15<sup>th</sup> saw a Great White Egret on the Reserve and a first winter Common Gull over Newton Road. Later on Forge Mill Lake, two Great White Egrets roosted. The 18<sup>th</sup> saw some 10 Waxwings fly towards Ray Hall, whilst on the 19<sup>th</sup> a Brambling flew over Hill Sixty by the railway. The 23<sup>rd</sup> saw a Pink-footed Goose on the Golf Course and a Woodcock was flushed at Hill Top (the Pink-foot still being present on the 29<sup>th</sup>).

On the 25<sup>th</sup> a Yellowhammer was near the dam, the following day seeing a Collared Dove in a garden within the recording area, that had been present daily for over a month. On the 28<sup>th</sup> a Golden Plover flew over High Bridges, whilst on the next day two Redshanks were on the Reserve and a Woodcock was near Grebe pool. Finally, two Red-legged Partridges were reported near Pennyhill Lane.

## **December**

December started with the Pink-footed Goose near the dam, two Ravens seen in flight, three Barnacle Geese at the Golf Course, a male Pintail on the Reserve, with the Oslo-ringed Common Gull also present. The 2<sup>nd</sup> saw a Red-head Smew on Forge Mill Lake and four Shelducks flying southwards. The 3<sup>rd</sup> saw a Woodcock in flight over the river Tame, the Smew still present and Yellow-legged and Great black-backed Gulls also being recorded at Swan Pool.

The 6<sup>th</sup> saw an impressive flock of some 140 Linnets near the pet cemetery (adjoining the Crematorium), whilst on the 10<sup>th</sup>, the Smew was still on Swan Pool and a Great Black-backed Gull was also recorded there. The 11<sup>th</sup> saw a Yellow-legged Gull on Swan Pool, together with the Smew (still on Swan Pool on the next day), Peregrine and Kestrel also being sighted at Dartmouth Park.

The 13<sup>th</sup> saw a Great White Egret on Forge Mill Lake, the Smew now being present there, a Chiffchaff at Ray Hall and male Blackcap by the boathouse. The 14<sup>th</sup> saw the Pink-footed Goose on the Golf Course, the next day seeing the Smew still on Forge Mill Lake. On the 16<sup>th</sup> a Woodcock was flushed by Cypress Pool, the following day seeing two Ravens, the Smew, and the Oslo Common Gull at Forge Mill Lake.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> the Smew was back on Swan Pool. The 21<sup>st</sup> saw it back on Forge Mill Lake and a Yellow-legged Gull was noted near the slipway. On the 26<sup>th</sup> the Smew still present on Forge Mill Lake, while the last day of the year saw it on Swan Pool for its 30<sup>th</sup> day of Valley residence. Readers will be interested to examine its

routine which seems to have centred on short flights between Swan Pool and Forge Mill Lake- unusual for such an uncommon visitor. Finally, Two Yellowhammers were seen by Kingfisher Corner.

### **September 2<sup>nd</sup> (All Day Bird Race)**

The following birds were recorded on a busy day. Some of the species recorded here are not shown in the excel chart or monthly report.

**Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Barnacle Goose, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Pochard , Tufted Duck, Goosander, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Lapwing, Snipe, Green Sandpiper, Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Rock Dove (feral pigeon), Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove ,Ring-necked Parakeet, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Wren , Dunnock, Robin, Redstart, Wheatear, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Cetti's Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler ,Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting and Tawny Owl.**

### ***From the Editor***

*As usual, our associated team of birdwatchers has continued with a sizeable and valuable set of observations. They visit a variety of sites in the Valley and have their own particular agendas when recording. It may be that the birds recorded might be considered as those generally inhabiting 'wild space' rather than gardens and records of several of the visiting species noted have been of great value to regional and national ornithologists studying the movements of individual birds and their populations. You are also reminded that back numbers of the bulletin contain hundreds of ornithological observations accumulated over the last 45 years. These may contain telling data with regard to the ongoing ornithological picture over time. The editor holds archive copies and if anyone would like to get involved in a sizeable research project, he is able to supply the data. Over time a number of members have commented that they would have liked the team to have given additional data on our common and well- loved birds. The team hopes that the inclusion of the list from the All-Day Bird Race will reassure readers that most of their favourites are active as usual on this representative day. It is also important to remind everyone that we do have an excellent newsletter and that Jenni Wilding would love your observations of common birds –or of any birds for that matter!!*

### **The recorders**

Richard Baker, Roger Burns, Thomas Bridgewater, Tony Carrington, John Clarke, Martin Dawson, Mark Dickinson, Richard Eyres, Matthew Fletcher, Pete Forbes, Vicky Gurney, Pete Hackett, Oliver Hague, Matt Hadlington, Steve Hextell, Tim Hextell, Clive Higgins, Bethany Ixer, Mike Ixer, Dave Jackson, Hughie King, Ade Kirton, Catherine Knowles, Steve Lilly, Gareth Marlow, Mike Nicklin, Eric Norman, Craig Reed, Steve Roper, Dave Saunders, Tracy Saunders, Pam Thompson, Dave Waite, Craig Whitelaw.



**Black-necked Grebe (P. Hackett), Grey Phalarope (A. Purcell), Spotted Flycatcher (M. Fletcher).**



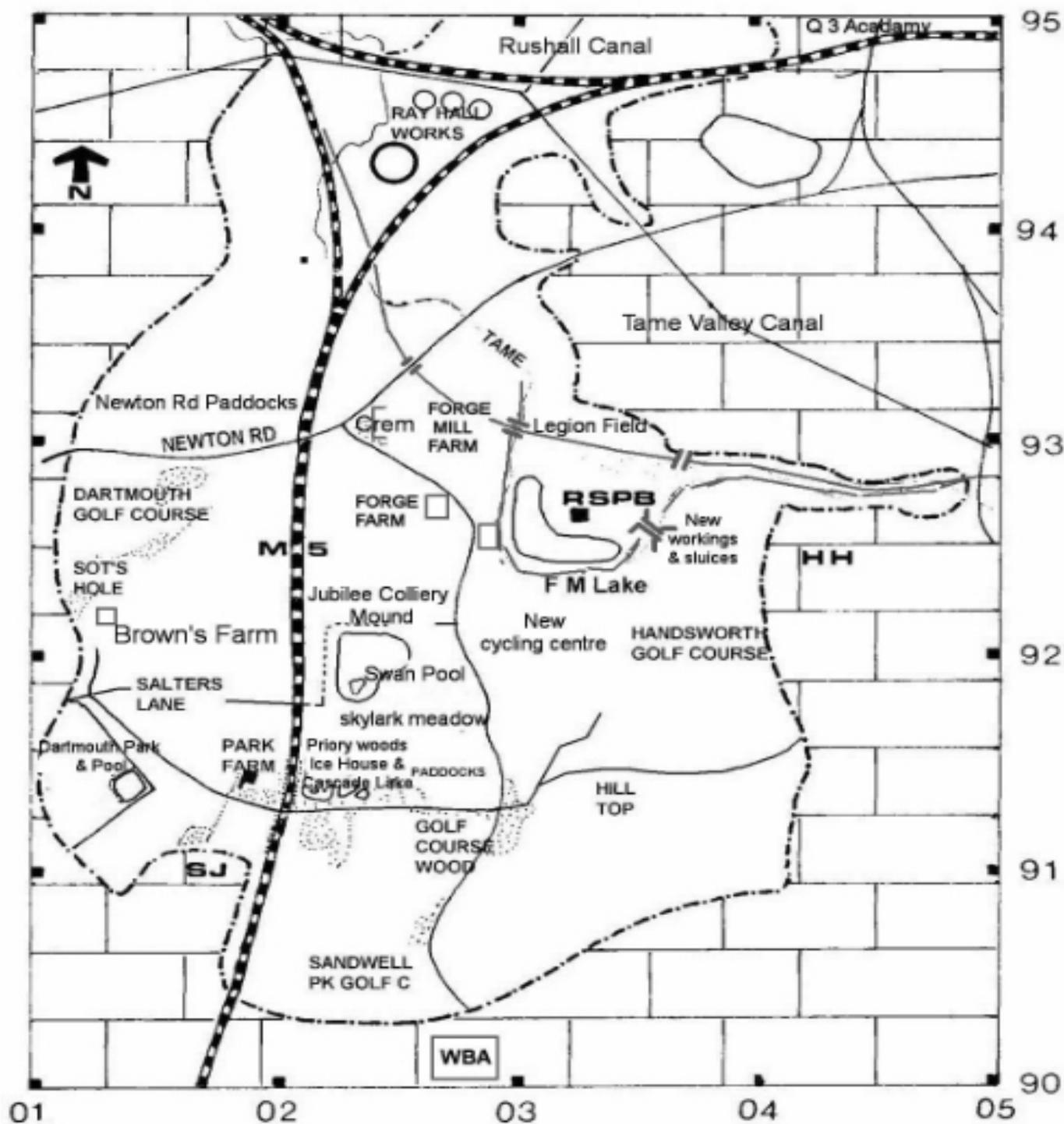
**Smew - Pete Hackett**

**Ring Ouzel (Pete Hackett), Cattle Egret (Steve Anderson) & Whinchat (Matt Fletcher).**



## Appendix

### 1. Map of the Sandwell Valley Bird Survey Area



As readers have suggested in response to previous editions in our bulletins, the exact locations to which we are guided by the birders in their report are not always precise. Last year we attempted to improve the situation by inclusion of some extra data to assist you. The final item is compiled with the help of Grid Reference Finder (a popular website). Sadly a few names will continue to have some mystery attached to them, so you may need to contact the team about these!

## 2 Grid References of some important sites

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	SP 015913	Priory Woods East	SP025914
Europa Paddock & Wood	SP018911	Railway Field (Hill 60)	SP031929
Forge Farm	SP023926	Ray Hall Works	SP 024944
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
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	SP 015913	Priory Woods East	SP025914
Europa Paddock & Wood	SP018911	Railway Field (Hill 60)	SP031929
Forge Farm	SP023926	Ray Hall Works	SP 024944
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



**Little Owl (Terry Parker). What is the current status of this once frequent bird?**

## **Sandnats outreach: work done by our members on different Sandwell sites.**

### **Mike Poulton's Rowley Hills Annual Report 2023**

In the early months of the year Friends of Rowley Hills volunteering time was spent at two of the species-rich Rowley Hills sites, Portway Hill SINC, and the small hillside paddock near Oakham Riding Stables. Winter tasks at both were mainly cutting down hawthorn to the stumps and strimming bramble. Without intervention they would quickly invade the remaining areas of species-rich grassland. Arisings were piled into mounds to create habitats for small rodents, and larger logs were offered to people living locally who have log-burning fires. Hawthorn and bramble are a good food source for birds and small rodents. Bramble fruits in late summer and autumn, and hawthorn berries remain on the bush all through the winter. Both resident and migratory birds use hawthorn and bramble thickets for nesting, so it is vital that areas are left untouched.

During one of the February volunteering days a badger's skull was uncovered from beneath a large patch of bramble near the top of Portway Hill. Further down the hillside above the Wildlife Trust owned land is a badger sett hidden in dense undergrowth, but it was quite a surprise to find the skull at this top end of the site (*side and front view of the Badger's skull below*). Thanks go to Andy Purcell for confirming the identification.

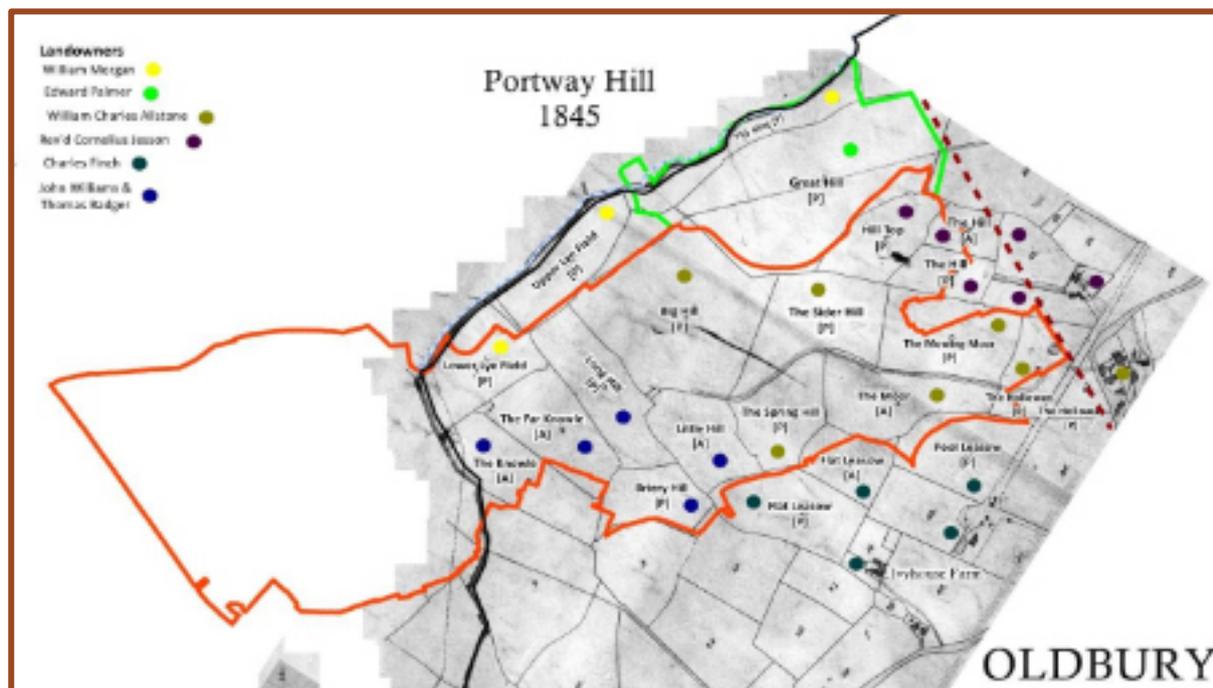


Another task undertaken by volunteers during the winter months was to expose a 30-metre lost section of old dry-stone wall field boundary that predates quarrying on Rowley Hills. With years of neglect, the wall had become lost beneath a tangled mass of hawthorn, bramble, and other rank vegetation. Exposing this section of wall was a labour of love and took quite some effort. It now becomes another interesting feature for visitors to see when exploring the site.



**Exposing old moss-covered dry stone wall field boundary**

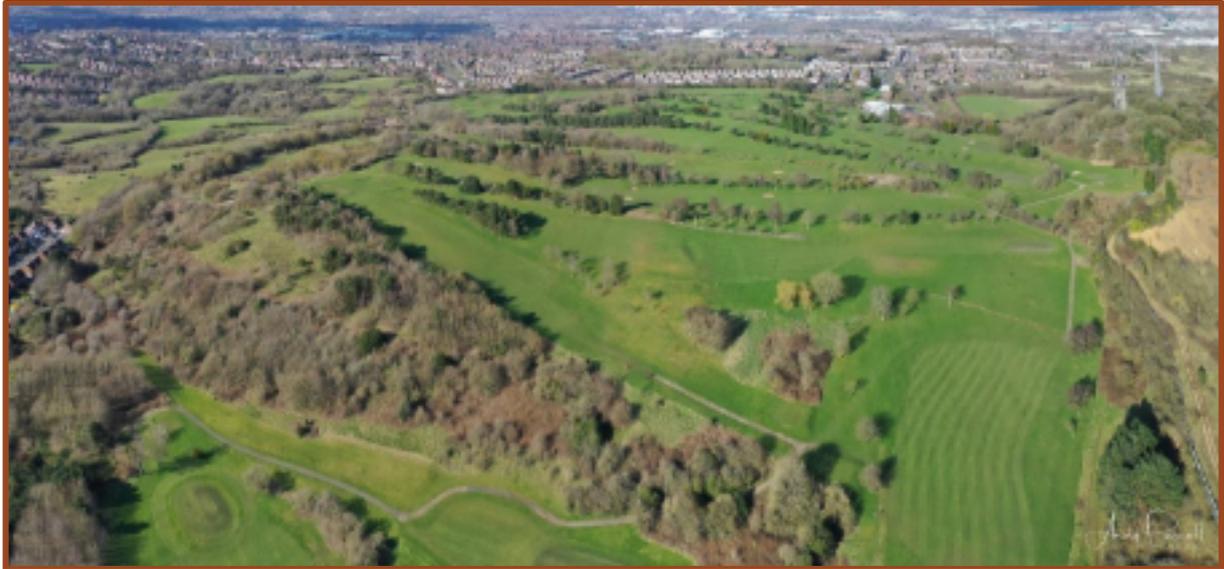
This 1845 map shows Portway Hill divided up into many small fields owned by seven different landowners. It is likely that many of them were used for livestock grazing.



In early April, Jake Williams from the Wildlife Trust, along with representatives from Friends of Rowley Hills, were invited by Head Groundsman Stewart Marshall at Dudley Golf Club to tour the course. The purpose of the visit was to give advice on where improvements and enhancements could make the course more wildlife friendly. The golf course has two stream - fed overgrown ponds, the higher, and larger of the two, completely choked up with Bulrush *Typha latifolia*, Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, and Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus*. The smaller pond, further down the stream channel, has some open water but is mainly dominated by rushes and irises. In their present state neither offers much wildlife value. The woodland areas situated just outside the course boundary are mainly Ash, with some Sycamore and Hornbeam. The ground flora here holds a large population of Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, along with Foxgloves *Digitalis purpurea*, and male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*. From the highest point of the course there is an impressive view towards the Malvern Hills and beyond, and from here one can also see down into Edwin Richards Quarry landfill. A multi-million-pound 30-year plan to landfill the quarry and build houses along the southern edge is now underway. On a bank outside the boundary fence, Stewart pointed to a nearby Badger Sett. This is bad news for the ground keepers as badgers are notorious for damaging grassland in their search for food. It was at this point, that high above us eight Buzzards could be seen circling around. To see so many together at any one time is quite unusual, and as we watched a Merlin came into view soaring and occasionally hovering above us. Following the visit all present agreed that connectivity between Dudley Golf Club, Warrens Hall Riding School, the Wildlife Trust, and Friends of Rowley Hills should be made, and a Management Plan for the whole area could potentially be written by Jake, with input from others, including local geologist Graham Worton.



Larger of the two ponds on Dudley Golf Course



**Aerial view of Dudley Golf Course taken in 2021 by Andy Purcell**

Once into April the first butterflies of the season began to appear on the hillside. Brimstone, Orange-tip, and Small Tortoiseshell were the first to be seen. A report on Portway Hill butterflies by transect recorder Andrew Cook appears later in this report.

In early May a solitary Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* was discovered on the Wildlife Trust owned land. This was a first record of this orchid from Rowley Hills. We now have three different species of orchid on the Portway Hill site, Green-winged, Bee and Pyramidal.



**Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* (left) and Scarlet Tiger Moth caterpillars *Callimorpha dominula* (right).**

The Scarlet Tiger *Callimorpha dominula* is a beautiful and distinctive moth, and during May, twelve of the moth caterpillars were released onto stinging nettle mid-way across the Portway Hill site. These caterpillars feed on various plants, Common Comfrey, Green Alkanet, Stinging Nettle, Bramble, various willows, Honeysuckle, Hound's Tongue, and Meadowsweet. Except for the last two all can be found nearby. Only time will tell if this release will be a success.

Sandnats butterfly walk on Portway Hill in June coincided nicely with the flight season of many of the site's butterflies. On the wing there were many Marbled Whites and Ringlets, both now nearing the peak of their flying season. Many other butterflies and day-flying moths were recorded. Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Small Skipper, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Common Blue, Latticed Heath, Burnet Companion, Silver Y, Six-spot Burnet, and Five-spot Burnet. In addition to this Matt Hadlington set down his Six-belted Clearwing Moth pheromone among a patch of the caterpillars' food plant Bird's-foot Trefoil. In no time at all several male moths were lured to the pheromone in search of females. During the visit several noteworthy plants were recorded, Great Lettuce, Burnet Saxifrage, Peach-leaved Bellflower, Tall Mouse-ear Hawkweed, Lucerne *Medicago sativa*, Reflexed Stonecrop, Field Scabious, Bee Orchid, and Pyramidal Orchid. A more comprehensive report of this meeting appeared in the 2023 Autumn/Winter Bulletin.

During the spring and summer months Mark Webster spent time looking at invertebrates on Rowley Hills, resulting in him finding a good number of beetles, weevils, and shield bugs, some of them new for the site. At the end of May he recorded an Alfalfa Snout Weevil, *Otiorhynchus ligustici*, on Hogweed growing in a hollow near the top of the narrow track leading through Bob's Canyon. Determined later, this turned out to be the 1st UK record of this weevil since 1993, and only the 12th since 1835! Intriguingly, it is a flightless weevil and none of its food plant Lucerne grows anywhere near to where it was found, although this plant does grow elsewhere on Portway Hill. Other notable finds were Thistle-head Weevil *Rhinocyllus conicus*, from the strip of vegetation at the base of the rockface, of which there are very few local sightings of this true weevil, and *Cryptocephalus fulvus* on Black Knapweed in the wide strip of vegetation that runs along the base of the extended crags just north of the open rockface, the first county record for 11 years.



***Otiorhynchus ligustici* and Gorse Shieldbug *Piezodorus lituratus* on Portway Hill (Mark Webster)**

Other than beetles, shield bugs, and weevils, he also recorded two 'Jumping Spiders' *Pseudeuophrys lanigra* and Zebra Spider *Salticus scenicus*, both hunting for prey on the main Blue Rock Quarry rockface. Mark's full list of Portway Hill invertebrates is available from him on request.

### **More on the Black Country UNESCO Geopark**

It was in July 2020 when the Black Country was officially given UNESCO global geopark status. In July 2023, as part of the process to secure UNESCO status for another four years after the current term comes to an end in summer 2024, the geopark team welcomed evaluators Helga Chulepin, from Uruguay, and Gloria Garcia, from Spain. The visit by Helga and Gloria was to advise on how we can grow and mature as a Geopark and to ensure that the Geopark is functioning as it should be.

# UNESCO visits geopark as part of mission

By Bev Holder

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@StourbridgeNews

UNESCO evaluators spent a few days in the region assessing the progress of the Black Country Global Geopark since it gained UNESCO global status three years ago.

The geopark team welcomed Helga Chulepin from Uruguay and Gloria Garcia from Spain as part of the revalidation mission.

It was in July 2020 that the Black Country was officially given UNESCO global geopark status.

The visit last week by Helga and Gloria was part of the process to secure UNESCO status for another four years after the current term ends next summer.

The Black Country Global Geopark comprises a number of partners including Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton councils, Natural England, Canal and River Trust and the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country.



Helga Chulepin from Uruguay and Gloria Garcia from Spain

During the week, Helga and Gloria were given a whistle-stop tour of geosites across the Black Country including Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve, Smestow Valley, Moorcroft Wood, Walsall Arboretum and

Sandwell Valley Country Park where they met with staff, partners, members of the community and volunteers.

Graham Worton, from the Black Country Global Geopark, said: "It's been a pleasure to welcome Helga and Gloria to the Black Country to show them first hand why the Black Country is so special and was deemed worthy of UNESCO status three years ago.

"During their visit Helga and Gloria have seen some of the region's highlights and learnt about our successes.

"They've also given us guidance on ways we can develop and made suggestions to help us strengthen our work in the future.

"Maintaining UNESCO status is important for the Black Country. It secures the future of our geological and cultural heritage, supports the visitor economy and will help bring in funding to support our work."

The geopark will find out later this year if it has been successful in retaining UNESCO status.



**Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark revalidation visit to blue Rock Quarry - July 2023**

It has now been confirmed that the Black Country was successfully re-validated and given the ‘Green Card’ along with some very useful advice from our international colleagues.

In September the Wildlife Trust and Friends of Rowley Hills spent some time in the small species-rich hillside paddock near Warrens Hall Riding Stables. In addition to cutting down hawthorn, blackthorn, and bramble, collecting Betony *Stachys officinalis* and Devil’s-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* seeds was also on the agenda, as both grow abundantly on this site. While harvesting seed from Devil’s-bit Scabious, several carnivorous Spiked Shield Bugs *Picromerus bidens* were found on the leaves and stems. A closer look revealed that two of the bugs had pierced a Devil’s-bit Scabious sawfly larva *Abia sericea* and were feeding on its bodily fluids.



**Spiked Shieldbug *Picromerus bidens* feeding on Devil's-bit Scabious Sawfly *Abia sericea***

In November Sarah Henton de Angelis, a consultant working for Tornillo Scientific, a company based in Liverpool, visited Portway Hill. Tornillo Scientific have been engaged by Natural England to generate case studies at four of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark sites, Portway Hill being chosen by Black Country geologist Graham Worton to be one of the four case studies where there is something special about the biodiversity.

The reports will show how important disturbed soils of the landfill and rock faces are. Their rich basaltic and underlying geology supports a set of conditions that create a particular habitat, and the influence of geodiversity create the foundation of nature recovery, along with site management processes to get the best from sites in different settings. The reports will be concluded in 2024. December 2023 turned out to be one of the wettest on record and very little time could be given to volunteering. During the month I received the following Rowley Hills bird sightings report from Nick Horton, and Andrew Cook's butterfly transect report.

### **Nick Horton's 2023 Bird Report**

Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps overwintered and were seen feedings in the same trees as Redwings and Fieldfares, something twenty years ago thought impossible. On February 7<sup>th</sup> at about 6:30am while I was out walking the dog, a Woodcock (photo by Andy Purcell) struck up from the base of the boundary hedge of land under the ownership of Portway Farm. This was a new bird record for the Portway Hill site, and several more were seen later in the month.



On the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> March the first Chiffchaff of the year was heard calling in the old quarry. On numerous occasions Chiffchaffs were seen on Portway Hill during the winter months. It is always a pleasure to hear the first one calling as it heralds the start of spring.

Other than familiar birds such as Blackbird, Corvids, Tits, Finches etc, more unusual was the sighting of a Ring Ouzel in early April. In May at Warren Halls Stables, a Spotted Flycatcher was quite happily feeding in a hawthorn bush near to the rock face about 30 metres from a badger sett. April saw two Peregrines together - flying high above the masts. A peregrine could often be seen perched on the rail of the highest platform of one of them. Overflying Red Kites were seen five times in 2023, with one landing on the pylons on nearby Lion Farm football pitches, and in September a Redstart was noted. Tawny Owl was also an occasional sighting during the year. Whitethroats were plentiful, but only one pair of Lesser Whitethroat was seen. On a downside, the Swift population appears to have crashed.

### **Andrew Cook's Portway Hill Butterfly Transect report 01/04/23 – 30/09/23.**

2023, was to be my first full season of recording on the butterfly transect covering the Portway Hill area of the Rowley Hills, following on from Mike Poulton in May 2022. The first butterfly sighting noted was a Small Tortoiseshell on the 24/03/23 near the Wildlife Trust's nature reserve on Portway Hill with an occasional Comma and Peacock sighted over the following few weeks.

As expected, week one walk of the transect season, at the beginning of April, was quiet with mainly the hibernating species being recorded. Comma (five), Peacock (three) and Small Tortoiseshell (five) were seen along with a single Brimstone and Orange-tip. This continued through the rest of April with weekly sightings in the 15- 20 range. The first sighting of a Red Admiral was recorded in week two with a Green-veined White in week three. Due to a few days of colder weather, week four saw a drop in recordings to 14, with only three species sighted, Small Tortoiseshell (seven), Peacock (five) and two Orange-tips. The Weekly totals for April being 15, 20, 16, 14, with seven species being noted.

The beginning of May saw the first step up in numbers into the thirties. Leading the way was the Peacock with 25 over the first two weeks. This proved to be the highpoint for it, as weekly numbers were recorded in single figures or not at all for the rest of the season. Orange-tip (mainly males identified) briefly challenged with a

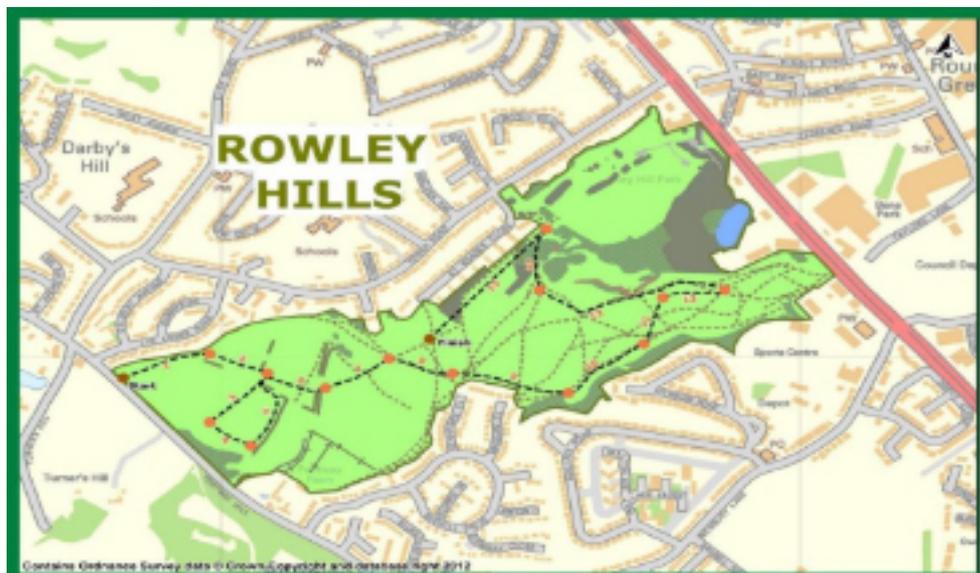
high of 11 in the middle of May, this proving to be the peak of the season for this species with none recorded into June. May also saw the emergence of Large and Small Whites, with the first day-flying moths (Latticed Heath and Burnet Companion) being recorded from mid-month onwards. The last week of May saw another jump in numbers to 71, week nine on 27/05/23, providing the first sightings of Small Heath (20) and Common Blue (six). Other notable sightings during this month include Green Hairstreak, Holly Blue, Small Copper, and Speckled Wood. Weekly totals for May were 34, 38, 39, 41 and 78, with 14 Species being recorded.

The first week in June saw a fall in species recorded, eight compared to 13 the previous week. This count consisted of Small Heath (37), Burnet Companion (25) and Common Blue (15), the peak of the year for this butterfly. The following week saw 15 species, with only Small Heath (35) getting into double figures giving a count of 60 compared to 59 the week before. The middle of the month saw the first sighting of the year of a lone Marbled White along with a pair of Meadow Browns and the only recording of a Painted Lady for the season. The middle to end of June saw a relative explosion of sightings. This was led by Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Small Heath, along with the first Ringlets and Large and Small Skippers of the season. I also recorded my first Silver Y. Red Admirals appeared more regularly, but in low numbers. The last week of June hit 431 sightings with Marbled White (151), Ringlet (140) Meadow Brown (61) and Small Heath (29). Weekly totals for June were 88, 71, 193, and 431- 25 Species being noted.

July's first week turned out to be the best of the season. A total of 609 sightings were recorded led by Marbled White (214), Ringlet (169), and Meadow Brown (104). All other individual species were below 34. This week included my first sighting of a Chimney Sweeper (three) on the upper slopes of Bury Hill Park. The following week however, turned grey, wet, and windy. Marbled White and Ringlet numbers had dropped noticeable to around 50 and continued to fall, with only the Meadow Brown holding steady at around or above 80 for the rest of the month. Emergence of Gatekeeper kept sightings at around 300 for the remainder of July with 78 & 100 recorded in the last two weeks. Weekly totals for July were 609, 300, 312, and 302. Species noted totalled 25.

August got off to a poor start, the weather for the first week consisting of rain, wind and overcast grey skies which prevented any chance to do a count, the only one of the recording season. The rest of the month was dominated by Gatekeepers and Meadow Brown, all other species seen were recorded in single figures. Weekly totals for August were 203, 159, 104 and 30, with eighteen Species being recorded.

Butterfly sightings in September had begun to fall, apart from a relative increase in Speckled Wood with 11 and 6 seen during the first two weeks of the month. Red Admiral numbers, although still in single figures, were also noticeably up on previous walks with 23 recorded throughout September. Virtually all of these were seen on the wing heading uphill in a south westerly direction. Apart from a solitary Silver Y, no day-flying moths were recorded in September. Weekly totals for September: were 35, 15, 12 and 11 with twelve species recorded. A transect map is provided below.



The following table provides a comparison of the 2022 and 2023 results.

2022			2023	
Position	Species	Recorded	Species	Recorded
1	Ringlet	589	Meadow Brown	596
2	Meadow Brown	563	Gatekeeper	468
3	Gatekeeper	443	Marbled White	464
4	Marbled White	353	Ringlet	413
5	Small Heath	179	Small Heath	201
6	Burnet Companion	159	Small Skipper	126
7	Small Tortoiseshell	52	Large White	109
8	Large White	50	Small Tortoiseshell	86
9	Latticed Heath	39	Peacock	78
10	Small White	38	Small White	70
11	Large Skipper	36	Common Blue	65
12	Common Blue	35	Burnet Companion	54
13	Peacock	29	Speckled Wood	52
14	Speckled Wood	24	Essex Skipper	47
15	Comma	20	Comma	45
16	Small Skipper	19	Latticed Heath	45
17	Green-veined White	16	Orange-tip	42
18	Small Copper	13	Red Admiral	51
19	Holly Blue	12	Large Skipper	30
20	Essex Skipper	11	Green-veined White	29
21	Red Admiral	11	Shaded Broad-bar	20
22	Six-Spot Burnet	11	Six-Spot Burnet	18
23	Narrow-B'd 5-spot Burnet	10	Small Copper	16
24	Green Hairstreak	5	Green Hairstreak	6
25	Painted Lady	5	Narrow-B'd 5-spot Burnet	6
26	Shaded Broad-bar	4	Brimstone	6
27	Brimstone	3	Holly Blue	5
28	Orange-tip	3	Silver Y	4
29	Cinnabar	3	Chimney Sweeper	3
30	Mother Shipton	2	Hummingbird Hawk Moth	1
31	Brimstone Moth	1	Large Yellow Underwing	1
32	Flame Carpet	1	Mother Shipton	1
33	Hummingbird Hawk Moth	1	Painted Lady	1
34			Small Yellow Underwing	1

## Summary

Overall, 36 species were recorded on this transect, of which 23 were butterflies and 13 moths. Included in the 13 moth species are Hummingbird Hawkmoth, Large Yellow Underwing, Common Carpet and Yellow Shell (the last two accidentally omitted from the table). These four moths are not normally recorded on transect.

This gave a total of 3171 sightings comprising of 3015 butterflies and 152 day flying moths, plus a single sighting of each of the four additional species. 25 transect walks were carried out, the first August one being lost to bad weather. Looking at the total weekly numbers of sightings for 2023, It appears that this was a better year overall than 2022. I think the week of wet weather early July and of course last year's very hot summer has had some effect on this year's season.

## Footnote

All my transect results are uploaded weekly to the UK-BMS website and forwarded to EcoRecord for their information at the end of the season. Table "Comparison of 2022 and 2023" is to give an idea of species recorded and their numbers only. The yearly total is a guide, as no recordings were taken during weeks 1-4 of 2022 and like 2023, a week in August is missing also due to poor weather. Also, as I am relatively new to recording, some species numbers will be under recorded due to difficulty of identification on the wing.

## Sandwell Valley Woodland Studies

### The Cut-leaf Beech (*Fagus sylvatica Asplenifolia*) in Park Farm Wood



In 1701 the first Earl of Dartmouth commissioned the building of Sandwell Hall as his new residence. He had been politically very successful. As a Hanoverian Tory he became Lord Privy Seal from 1713- 1714. His new residence was completed in 1711 and the family residency of the Hall continued for a number of happy years. Following the completion of the building and in the middle of the century, the family created a park, with modification to many of the surroundings of the Hall and it is almost certain that this period saw the introduction of a substantial number of exotic or unusual trees. Bill Stott (First Warden of the Sandwell Valley) listed several species in this category, and some still remain. One of the trees was a Cut-leaf Beech. It is significant to note that this species was at that time a popular planting on similar estates. It was to be found in Park Farm Wood – very close to the edge of the bridge over the M5 motorway (construction of which caused the loss of about a hectare of the old park woodland and an historic ice house).

The tree was a regular point of interest on the early guided walks around the nature trail and survived until harsh weather in February 2012 saw its demise (Photo beneath). The trunk's fragmentary remains can still be found today. The following photos briefly summarise the story.



Passing time saw the fallen tree as a target for many visiting families because it provided a relatively safe climb for children of most ages. In the months immediately following, some tidying up of the smaller branches took place. In a fascinating 2013 exercise the farm management decided to add interest to Park Farm Wood by commissioning a series of metal and wood sculptures situated at random spots through the wood. A chain saw sculptor took an interest in the fallen beech and produced some imaginative results (photo below).



Some of the works of art created in the wood remained for several years, but unfortunately vandalism damaged many and natural agencies steadily began to degrade the trunk and its sculpture.



**Upper left and right:** July 2019 - showing massive fungal invasion by *Ganoderma* sp. **Lower left:** April 2020 degradation of the trunk. **Lower right:** February 2024 -with some two thirds if the trunk reduced to fragments.

It seems fungal decay was clearly a key factor in nature’s recycling scheme here, with invertebrates probably playing a part in degrading the underside. The earlier years had seen a heavy coat of protective varnish over the artwork providing a significant delay before inevitably natural processes took over. The fragmentary remains of the beech remain for you to see, but they may not be there for much longer. The girth of this lovely tree was 300 cm when measured in 2002.

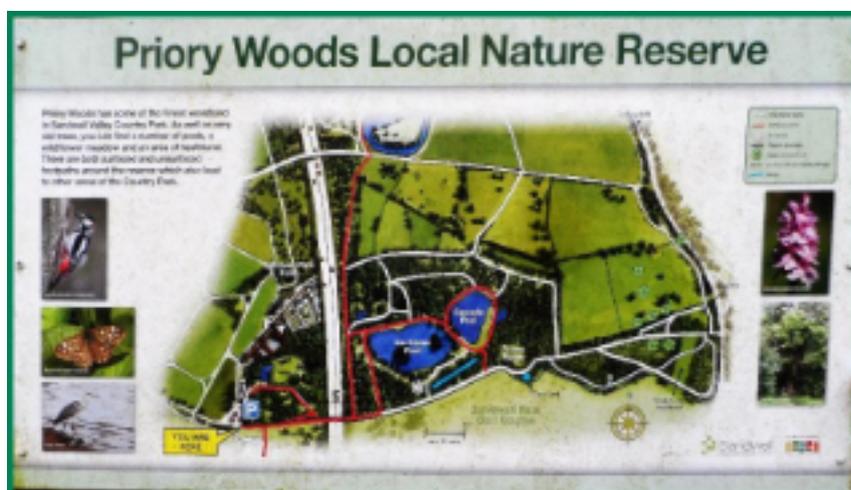
### More on the Sandwell Valley Woodlands

Sandwell Woodlands were probably historically deciduous. A frail line of ecological continuity with what was once probably a rich insect fauna remains with us in today’s woodland fragments. The evidence for this currently lies in the shape of discovered invertebrate species. Other organisms will reveal more.

It is helpful to consider the life of a native tree species –such as an oak- as one which proceeds with a steady succession of fauna and flora as the tree ages. A sapling soon attracts invertebrates seeking out favoured parts of the plant to suit their needs. The tree will also be of value to tourists- species that take advantage of it for their own purposes. It is easy to follow the progression- as the tree increases in size and ages, branches fall or become damaged and these rot and attract saproxylic species (larvae developing in the decaying wood and associated organisms). A review of the whole process may reveal:

- A steady accumulation of associated species- dependant on the biodiversity of the surrounding area. A sapling growing in the Wyre Forest is likely to attract far more species than one growing on Brown’s Farm. Many insect species have limited territories.
- A host fauna that gradually evolves as years pass. Tree leaves may develop protective chemicals resisting some potential colonists. The canopy may reduce, with proliferating dead and decaying branches gradually attracting different organisms. Many ancient woodland sites in the British Isles have over the course of time, accumulated very extensive lists of ‘dead wood’ beetles. Windsor Forest researchers have recorded 382 species of these specialised insects there.

One might see enlightened woodland management as evolving from an understanding of the holistic development of the habitat. Regarding the trees (so dominant and potentially hosting great biodiversity) an appreciation of their developmental stages and a willingness to allow these to proceed to maximise site biodiversity is particularly praiseworthy. For instance, advice in various publications increasingly includes an urgent plea to managers to site or change public footpaths so they are not in the immediate vicinity of over-mature trees. Mapping these is of key importance because, if trees are deliberately felled for health and safety reasons, a culpable reduction of biodiversity on a reserve is almost certainly going to result. Appropriate signage in reserves helps. An excellent notice board in the Park Farm Visitor Centre car park (near the entrance to the main track to the woodlands) shows a concise plan of the main footpaths – suggesting to the wider community how they might best enjoy the woodlands in safety. It is based on collective managerial experience.



## Ecological Research on Trees already completed in Sandwell Valley Priory Woods.



**Giant Sweet Chestnut with much dead wood (left) and a decaying branch high in the canopy of an old Ash (right) are both ideal habitat for various saproxylic insects.**

### Historical Review

As we passed into the new millennium in 2000, it was thought that some Sandnats survey work ought to reflect the significance of this. The obvious target was the trees. Sandwell Valley might never have had a dense tree cover because the southern area on rising ground was most probably heathland. The remainder might have seen small farm tenancy and land ownership by a few dominant personalities, who adorned the surroundings of their houses with introduced tree species, whilst allowing a good number of native species to persist. The Deer Park of Sandwell Hall most likely reflected this practice.

#### **1. The invertebrate evidence for the antiquity of the central woodlands (Park Farm and Priory Woods).**

Early evidence from floral and faunal studies in Sandwell Valley suggested that our woodlands retained traces of antiquity as previously mentioned. Two assessment tools for this could be used, allowing us to discover an Index of Ecological continuity (IEC) and Saproxylic Quality (SQI) Index score for our central band of woodlands (1). These are derived from scoring beetle species found by us during survey here over the past 40 years. The list may be visited on:

<https://khepri.uk/dataset/0C36286E-EC10-478F-A7D6-D7E257EBE1AA>

An original report of this investigation may be found in Sandnats Bulletin Vol.24 No.3 March 2002, but some changes have taken place since then. Shortly we shall submit a revised and updated beetle list for assessment because additional qualifying beetles have been discovered in the survey area. Currently this is our position amongst the English woodlands qualifying for inclusion in the IEC and SQI:

Neighbouring Sutton Park SSSI has a ranking of 226. Park Farm and Priory Woods rank 232<sup>nd</sup>.

***N.B. for inclusion in the index a site has had to be competently surveyed for selected beetles. The list of qualifying sites is steadily increasing and as such surveys take place, rankings are continually changing.***

The woods also contain a substantial number of hoverflies associated with ancient woodlands in the British Isles. Records of these are also found in the Bulletin previously mentioned.



Lesser Stag Beetle (Local: SQI score 2) & Scarce Cardinal Beetle (Very Local. SQI score 4) Photo J. Wilding.

## 2. The Millennium Tree Survey

Survey work was envisaged in 2000, but only began in earnest in February 2001, the main body of the work concluding in March 2002. The resultant information was made available to Country Park Managers some time ago and is reproduced in part here. Subsequently additional data were added, but not in quantity.

The survey criteria follow:

- The trees received English names ('Oak' might mean Pedunculate or Sessile).
- A GPS Garmin 12XL was used to determine grid references. These were usually as precise as possible (SP0000 0000) but a number may exhibit small inaccuracies-because of the density of tree cover and the more limited satellite technology of the time.
- The Site/Location names are in accordance with those historically in use, but there have been some small changes in recent times.
- Several isolated subsites (including Red House Park) have been incompletely worked.
- The dates when the survey took place are recorded in the main database as 'February 2001-March 2002', but a few records were added in 2020 and are marked with an asterisk \*.
- A steel tape measure was used to measure girths at breast height.
- A cut-off point was established in that trees of less than 100 cm in girth were not included in the survey. There was plenty of room for error here because this was established by eye! It is probable that around 95% percent of trees fell into this category.
- When several qualifying trees were clumped together, coloured pins were used to show which trees had been processed.
- The main database gave additional information about the state of each tree.
- The database contains details of 437 larger trees.
- The table presented here contains only records of the trees with girths of 300 cm or more.

Working on the assumption that some species of actively growing mature oak trees may increase in girth by 1cm per year, data change will have taken place for a significant number recorded here. Those having girths of more than 300cm will have increased substantially. Often these will be beautiful mature specimens worthy of protection and preservation orders and some isolated ones in paddocks may benefit by being fenced to avoid damage by grazing livestock.

There are a small number of trees with girths of more than 390cm. They often host specialised invertebrate species and therefore make a unique contribution to the biodiversity of the Valley. It needs to be noted that the planting of quantities of trees may not significantly increase a site's biodiversity. Over the course of time, they may indeed do this- or may reduce biodiversity if the balance of tree species is wrong and management is inadequate. Too much tree cover may also mean a reduction of other important habitats such as bare earth, grassland and heathland.

In conclusion it is worth giving the oldest trees in the Valley (approaching or over 450 cm in girth) special attention. Many are senescent and will soon be reduced to hulks. The trees falling into this category include a number of great Sweet Chestnuts- probably planted by the Earl of Dartmouth shortly after Sandwell Hall was completed. They may be some 300 years old. Conservation of these treasures often entails removing fast growing scrub which can reduce the light reaching them. Veterans seldom get taller but may get a little broader - a most important matter is knowing exactly where they are located !!

**TABLE OF TREE STATISTICS (GIRTHS 300 TO 390 CM).  
Survey Dates: February 2001- March 2002**

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>GRID REF</b>	<b>SITE</b>	<b>GIRTH (breast height)</b>
London Plane	SP01409146	Dartmouth Park (Arboretum)	300 cm
Oak	SP01419175	King George's Field (Lodge Hill)	300 cm
Horse-chestnut	SP02489153	Stott's Copse (299)	300 cm
Ash	SP02499147	Priory Woods E	300 cm
Sycamore	SP02399152	Priory Woods N	300 cm
Oak	SP02829138	Paddock Six	300 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02709130	Golf Course Wood	300 cm
Turkey Oak	SP02019137	Park Farm Wood	300 cm
Ash	SP01669187	Land S of Salter's Lane	300 cm (damaged)
Ash	SP02589143	Priory Woods E	300 cm (fallen but live)
Sweet Chestnut	SP02779136	Golf Course Wood	300 cm (stump)
Sycamore	SP02259146	Priory Woods N	300 cm approx- pollard
Sweet Chestnut	SP02699131	Golf Course Wood	300 cm fallen
Oak	SP02589153	Stott's Copse (299)	300 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP01389175	King George's Field (Lodge Hill)	310 cm
Hybrid Bl.Poplar	SP01379149	Dartmouth Park (Arboretum)	310 cm
Horse-chestnut	SP02609146	Priory Woods E	310 cm
Ash	SP02319129	Priory Wood S	310 cm
Ash	SP02449162	Paddock Two	320 cm
Ash	SP02459140	Priory Wood (s.l.)	320 cm Priory Pool Ash
Ash	SP02579134	Priory Woods E	325 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02839155	Forge Lane Hedge (284)	330 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02799134	Golf Course Wood	330 cm
Oak*	SP03359275	RSPB Reserve	330 cm
Ash	SP02519140	Priory Woods E	330 cm
Beech	SP02829161	Forge Lane Hedge (284)	335 cm
Beech	SP02209149	Priory Woods N	340 cm
Beech	SP02879150	Forge Lane Hedge (284)	340 cm damaged
Oak*	SP03679287	Kingfisher Corner RSPB	348 cm (coppiced)
Sycamore	SP01349145	Dartmouth Park (Arboretum)	350 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP01369176	King George's Field (Lodge Hill)	350 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02579163	Paddock Three	350 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02729133	Golf Course Wood	350 cm (damaged)
Pedunculate Oak	SP02519133	Priory Wood (s.l.)	350 cm (damaged)
Sweet Chestnut	SP02819137	Paddock Six	360 cm
Hybrid Bl.Poplar	SP01329154	Dartmouth Park (Arboretum)	360 cm
Horse-chestnut	SP02279152	Priory Woods N	360 cm
Horse-chestnut	SP02509144	Priory Woods E	365 cm
Tulip Tree *	SP04069446	Red House Park	375 cm
Beech *	SP04069453	Red House Park	377 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02829143	Paddock Six	380 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02849138	Paddock Six	380 cm
Ash	SP01369178	King George's Field	380 cm
Beech	SP01419167	King George's Field	380 cm
London Plane	SP01549123	Dartmouth Park (Arboretum)	380 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02529148	Stott's Copse (299)	390 cm

**TABLE OF TREE STATISTICS (GIRTHS 400 TO 510 CM)**  
**Survey Dates: February 2001-March 2002**

SPECIES	GRID REF	SITE	GIRTH (breast height)
Sweet Chestnut	SP02769133	Golf Course Wood	400 cm (damaged)
Beech *	SP03349429	Pear Tree Avenue (rear by canal)	400 cm (estimate)
Sweet Chestnut	SP02789136	Golf Course Wood	400 cm stump)
Crack Willow	SP02429154	Priory Woods N	400 cm (layers)
Oak *	SP03879437	Red House Park	410 cm
Beech *	SP04059452	Red House Park	419 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02839155	Forge Lane Hedge (284)	420 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02819130	Golf Course Wood	450 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02819135	Golf Course Wood	450 cm (damaged)
Sweet Chestnut	SP02829130	Golf Course Wood	490 cm
Sweet Chestnut	SP02839135	Golf Course Wood	510 cm (damaged)



**Left: Sandwell's Largest Sweet Chestnut (girth 510 cm). Right: grazing damage to unfenced tree**



**Left: Ash near main track - pollarded for safety. Right: mature oak by RSPB path (girth 330 cm).**

## Gillian Barnard's Mistletoe Records (2022/2023)

Recording for mistletoe (*Viscum album*) began on January 1<sup>st</sup> and carried on until the end of April when the trees came into leaf. Most of the records came from North Birmingham, with a few records obtained elsewhere.

Mistletoe has male and female parts on different plants (dioecious) and is semi-parasitic on various broad-leaved trees, forming a haustorium where it connects to the tree.

Mistletoe has been in the area for quite a few years, mainly centred on the Hamstead area of Birmingham and is found on many trees in Perry Hall Park.

In winter months it is not always possible to identify on which species of tree Mistletoe is growing, due to the lack of leaves. A search at the base of some trees identified the species from fallen Autumn leaves.

Trees found to be common hosts were Lime, Hawthorn, Apple and Poplar. Other host trees included Rowan, Cherry and Acer species. The only bird recorded in the survey eating mistletoe berries in 2023 was a Wood Pigeon. In previous years a Mistle Thrush had been observed on Mistletoe in Rocky Lane.

The largest number of Mistletoe plants on one tree was 27 on an acer tree inside Witton cemetery. The total number of Mistletoe plants recorded was 101.



**Left: Perry Hall Park (single fine plant). Right: Witton Cemetery (many plants).**

### Table of Observations

The table was compiled to see how abundant Mistletoe is in the local area. Some records tell us on which species of tree it is growing. It may be useful to revisit the trees that have not been identified ('indet.') when they are in leaf. The chart is a starting point for further additions.

Descriptions of sightings for the various locations have not been straightforward in many cases and for that reason grid references are also included. Absolute precision cannot be guaranteed, but information should enable readers to locate most sites fairly easily.

**MISTLETOE (*Viscum album*) SIGHTINGS 2022/2023**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Plant numbers &amp; Host</b>
05.01.23	Molhay Gardens, Walsall Road Great Barr. SP 0515 9355	2 on a tree (indet.).
Jan.2023	Queslett Road East – Junction of Bakers Lane and Aldridge Road, Streetly - on roundabout. SP 0781 9641	1 on a tree (indet.).
07.01.23	Sandringham/Wensleydale Road (Near Tower Hill). SP 05486 92642	24 on a Lime.
07.01.23	Perry Hall Methodist Church Grounds, Rocky Lane, Perry Barr. SP 0561 9241	6 on a Hawthorn.
07.01.23	Baltimore Road Hamstead street tree. SP0518 9238	1 large plant on a tree (indet.).
11.01.23	Perry Hall Park BMX area. SP0575 9227	1 on a Hawthorn.
11.01.23	Perry Hall Park just outside BMX area. SP0571 9219	6 on an apple tree.
11.01.23	Perry Hall Park - back of Lavendon Road. SP0558 9229	3 on two large poplars.
15.01.23	Sutton Park - near Longmoor Pool. SP0956 9594.	1 on Hawthorn.
25.01.23	Perry Hall Park – near moat & sunken garden. SP0625 9184	1 large plant on Lime.
25.01.23	Perry Hall Park - Bottom of Rocky Lane Path in scrub. SP0569 9232	3 on 2 trees (one a cherry-one indet.).
27.01.23	Glenmead Primary School Grounds, Aldridge Road, Great Barr. SP0681 9383	13 on 5 trees (indet.).
30.0.23	Newton Road Great Barr - Tame Valley Canal Bridge. SP0364 9402	1 large plant on a tree (indet.)
01.02.23	Perry Hall Park to right of BMX track. SP0576 9233	4 on small tree (indet.).
02.02.23	Mellish Rd. (South side). Near Lichfield Road roundabout. Walsall. SP 02102 99428	1 large plant on a tree (indet.).
15.02.23	Rocky Lane -street tree - Perry Hall Methodist Church. SP 0564 9240	3 on one tree (indet.) all small.
14.02.23	In Witton Cemetery bordering The Ridgeway. SP0846 9176	27 on a tree- <i>Acer</i> sp.
20.04.23	Walsall Road Great Barr - between Towers Pub and Booths Farm Road. SP 0533 9328	3 on small Rowan street tree.
23.2.22	Back of Beauchamp Avenue on field edge. Handsworth Wood. SP0465 9245	1 on a tree (indet.).
Mar.2022	Seven Star Road Solihull. On wooded strip forming part of Solihull Bypass. Recorded by Richard Orton. SP1467 8043	6 on a tree - <i>Acer</i> sp.

***It is useful to have a set of local records for this plant published for the first time in the Bulletin. Let's join Gillian in hoping it acts as a catalyst for further recording so we can obtain a more complete picture of its colonisation in Birmingham and the Black County (Editor).***

## The Freshwater Surveys in 2023

We carried out eight surveys through the year, both in the Sandwell Valley and further afield. This is a summary of our findings. Where results tables are displayed. The following abundance categories apply:

<b>A</b>	<b>Too many to count</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>Lots</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>Some</b>
<b>O</b>	<b>A few</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>Individuals</b>
<b>*</b>	<b>Present, but no measure taken</b>



### Highgate Common

The first survey was a brief dip in a pond during our visit to Highgate Common on 15<sup>th</sup> April. We caught a nice variety of animals, including several Large Red Damselfly nymphs, which looked very close to emerging. Large Red Damselflies are one of the first to appear, usually towards the end of April. The most exciting find was a Great Crested Newt.

### Footprint Pond

Our second survey was a revisit to Footprint Pond, in the woodlands between Swan Pool and the M5. We set 20 bottle traps, specifically surveying for Great Crested Newts, (under Val's licence). The survey was carried out overnight on 28 / 29<sup>th</sup> May – towards the end of the newtling season. Although we did not get any GCNs, we did catch two male and one female Smooth Newts. The bye-catch included two adult and two larvae Great Diving beetles, numerous Water Fleas, Mosquito larvae, Freshwater Hoglice and a Wandering Snail. We decided to return later in the year to look for newt efts.

We returned to Footprint Pond on 6<sup>th</sup> September to sample the aquatic animals using pond nets and sorting trays. However, we were stymied because there was no water in the pond. It was possible to cross the centre of the basin and only experience wet mud. It will be interesting to see how well the pond recovers. I think it is starting to dry out regularly given the hotter, drier summers. The woodland vegetation has also grown back and could do with more management by Sandnats, perhaps next winter. The mud was definitely wet and it is hopeful that a lot of animals will have survived in the damp mud / vegetation.

Rather than twiddle our thumbs, we decided to kick-sample in the stream at the bottom of the hill. The stream was very overgrown in the open meadow area (photo below of an earlier visit), but had enough flowing water to sustain a wide variety of animals. We caught 12 different taxa, of which Freshwater Shrimps and Freshwater Hoglice were the most numerous. We also tried kick-sampling in the same stream where it ran through the wood. There, the community was less numerous, but again dominated by Shrimps and Hoglice. It also showed differences in that we had a different type of Flatworm, a Leech and Three-spined Sticklebacks



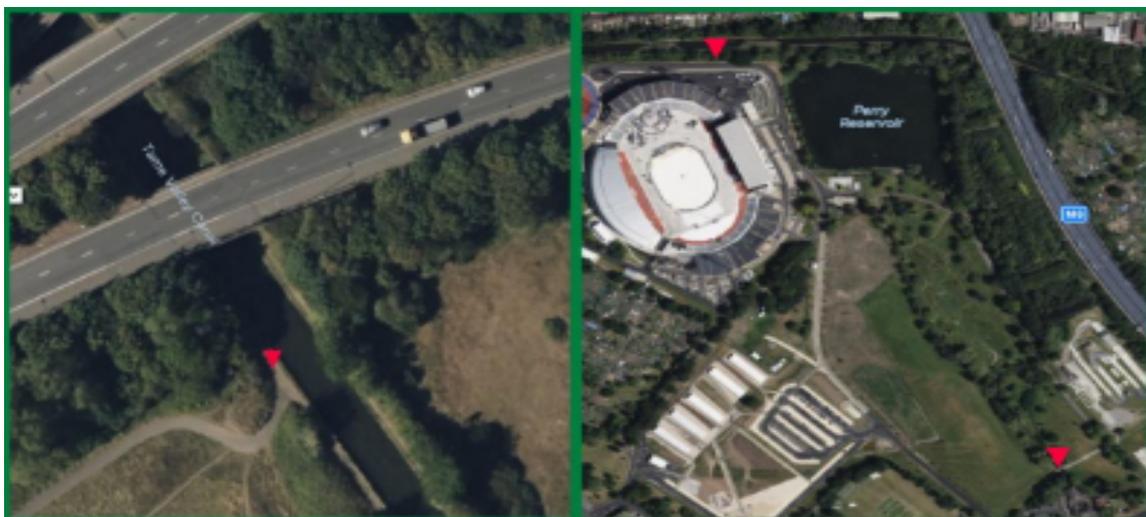
**Table showing details of the yield from the Stream Systems below Footprint Pool.**

	<i>Date</i>	06/09/2023	
	<i>Location</i>	Stream nr. Footprint Pond (Open)	Stream nr. Footprint Pond (woodland)
<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	SP 0224 9237	SP 0230 9224
Black Flatworm	<i>Polycelis sp.</i>	R	
White Flatworm	<i>Dendrocoeleum lacteum</i>		R
Brown Speckled Leech	<i>Erpobdella octoculata</i>		R
Marsh Snail	<i>Succinea sp.</i>	R	
Pea Cockle	Sphaeriidae	R	
Freshwater Hog Louse	Asellidae	C	C
Freshwater Shrimp	<i>Gammarus pulex</i>	A	C
Water Cricket	<i>Velia sp.</i>	O	
Cased Caddisfly Larva	Trichoptera	O	
Alderfly Larva	<i>Sialis sp.</i>	R	
Riffle Beetle	Elminthidae	R	
Blackfly Larva+	Simuliidae	R	
Meniscus Midge Larva	Dixidae	F	
Non-biting Midge Larva	Chironomidae	R	
3-Spined Stickleback	<i>Gasterosteus aculeatus</i>		R

### Tame Valley Canal

One of the areas neglected from our on-going survey of the aquatic habitats of the Sandwell Valley has been the Tame Valley Canal itself. It shares characteristics with both streams, (the water does move, although very slowly), and lakes, (deep, permanent water, often with significant aquatic vegetation) and so is an important component of the Valley system. We sampled the northern arm, near where it crosses the Tame and also the eastern arm, close to Perry Park. Whilst we were in the area, we also sampled the Holbrook Stream. The surveys, although brief, showed some interesting results. For example, this is the only place in the Valley where we have recorded Saucer Bug and Fish Leech. There were also several dragonfly and damselfly nymphs; the canals are excellent places to look for adults in the summer. The large diversity of molluscs would indicate a diversity of aquatic plants. It would be interesting to see what it is like in high summer.

The Holbrook Stream showed signs of pollution, indicated by the abundance of Tubifex worms, although the high numbers of Blackfly larva would indicate strong, turbulent flows, (they are filter feeders which require fairly high oxygen levels).



**Sampling points:** Tame Valley West (left) , Tame Valley East (right upper) & Holbrook Stream (right lower).

**Table showing details of the yield from the Tame Valley Canal and Holbrook Stream**

	<i>Date</i>	04/10/2023	11/10/2023	11/10/2023
	<i>Location</i>	Tame Valley Canal (W)	Tame Valley Canal (E)	Holbrook stream, Perry Park
<i>English Name</i>	<i>Scientific Name</i>	SP 0314 9462	SP 0656 9276	SP 0696 9221
True worm	Oligochaeta		R	
Blood worm	Tubificidae			A
Brown striped leech	<i>Erpobdella testacea</i>			R
Fish leech	<i>Piscicola geometra</i>	O		
Common Bithynia	<i>Bithynia tentaculata</i>		F	
Ramshorn Snail	<i>Planorbis planorbis</i>		R	
Ear Pond Snail	<i>Radix auricularia</i>		R	
Bladder snail	Physidae	*		R
Pea cockle	Spharidae		F	
Water Fleas	Cladocera	*		
Freshwater Hoglouse	Asellidae		F	F
Freshwater Shrimp	<i>Crangonyx pseudogracilis</i>			R
Swimming mayfly nymph	Baetidae	O	C	F
Coenagrionidae	<i>Erythrona naja</i>	R		
Dragonfly nymph	<i>Aeshnidae</i>		R	
Saucer bug	<i>Ilyocoris cimicoides</i>	R		
Lesser Waterboatman	Corixidae		C	
Blackfly larva	Simuliidae			F
Mosquito larva	Culicidae	*		
Crane-fly larva	Tipulidae	R		
Biting midge larva	Ceratopogonidae	R		
Non-biting Midge larva	Chironomidae	*		

### Bromwich Hall (West Bromwich)

In October, Sandnats visited Bromwich Hall for the first time. The aim was to assess the site with a view to more in-depth investigations in the future. The grounds contain the remains of a moat, which takes the form of a well-established lake with a wide variety of emergent vegetation. It also contained a wide variety of animals, from the late adult Common Darter dragonflies basking in the sun to the adult Water Scorpion (picture lower right) we fished out of the vegetation.



Table showing details of the yield from Bromwich Hall Moat

	<i>Date</i>	14/10/2023
	<i>Location</i>	Bromwich Hall
<i>Common Name</i>	<i>Scientific Name</i>	SP 0057 9426
Black Flatworm	<i>Polycelis sp.</i>	O
Bladder Snail	Physidae	O
Pea Cockle	Spharidae	C
Freshwater Shrimp	<i>Crangonyx pseudogracilis</i>	F
Pond Mayfly	<i>Chloeon dipteron</i>	C
Common Darter (adult)	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	*
Pond Skater	<i>Gerris sp.</i>	C
Water Scorpion	<i>Nepa cinerea</i>	R
Cased Caddisfly Larva	Trichoptera	R
Great Diving Beetle (Larva)	<i>Dytiscus sp.</i>	F
Meniscus Midge Larva	Dixidae	F
Phantom Midge Larva	<i>Chaobarus sp.</i>	C
Non-biting Midge Larva	Chironomidae	R



Richard Orton and Jenni Wilding examine the catch (left) . A glance at the creatures in the tray (right).

**Definitely a site which will repay further investigation.**

### **Willow Pond, RSPB**

This is a neglected pond on the edge of the meadow, surrounded by willow scrub and infested with *Crassula*. When first visited, in September, the prognosis was not good as, like Footprint Pond, it had dried out and all there was to show was a large patch of soggy *Crassula*, but apparently no water at all. The end of September saw torrential rain, (it does not seem to have stopped since), and the pond rapidly filled up. Without any expectations at all, we decided to dip it at the beginning of October. The results were startling.

**Table showing details of the yield from Willow Pond (infested with *Crassula*)**

	<i>Date</i>	03/10/2024
	<i>Location</i>	Willow Pond, RSPB
<b><i>Common Name</i></b>	<b><i>Scientific name</i></b>	SP 0333 9267
Freshwater Hogleuse	Asellidae	A
Freshwater Shrimp	<i>Crangonyx pseudogracilis</i>	C
Small Diving Beetle	Hydroporinae	C
Meniscus Midge Larva	Dixidae	C
Mosquito Larva	Culicidae	C
Biting Midge Larva	Ceratopogonidae	R
Non-biting Midge Larva	Chironomidae	R

Nothing particularly rare, but a huge abundance of animals where a week before there appeared to be nothing. Potentially, (although unlikely), the beetles might have flown in since the pond filled up, but nothing else could have. They must have been sheltering in the *Crassula*, which provided a substantial wet-blanket so that the animals were able to survive the drought. It will be interesting to see how the pond continues in 2024. Perhaps *Crassula* is not so useless after all!

Editor

*Another set of results helping us to get a little nearer to concluding this extended freshwater survey which was started some seven years ago. We have to accept that given the number of ponds and streams, plus the Canal and river systems, we are never likely to achieve a complete coverage of all our freshwater resources.*

*As a footnote, there is one feature that we may soon get round to investigating - the Crayfish population. The Signal Crayfish (photo below ) seems to have completely replaced the long-established Freshwater Crayfish in the Tame Valley Canal. Some may remain in the Rushall Canal, but none has been seen near its junction with the TVC beneath the M5/M6 motorway junction. Some 30 years ago they were certainly present there.*



### Now for something completely different. Some facts about parasitoid wasps.

Parasitoid wasps (Hymenoptera) comprise a fantastically varied and diverse group. Parasitoids can be usefully categorised into:

- **Ectoparasitoids** - with larval development basically **outside the host's integument** and nutrients being extracted via mouth-parts embedded in the host's integument;
- **Endoparasitoids** - with the larval development taking place **within the host's body**.

A further subdivision categorises parasitoid wasps as:

- **Idiobionts** - when the host is **completely immobilised** once attacked and the parasitoid larva devours the helpless host;
- **Koinobionts** –when the host **remains active** after attack and the parasitoid larva gradually develops within it until the host is entirely consumed and dies.

The parasitoid wasps probably originated in the Lower Jurassic (c. 195 myr), evolving from wood-boring sawflies, with the ichneumonids attacking wood-boring insect larvae. Some key innovations such as different ovipositor morphology and host detection strategies (including echolocation) allowed parasitoid wasps to exploit different hosts.



An example of a koinobiont ectoparasitoid pimpline ichneumon in action may be seen here in this larva slowly devouring an active spider (upper left). Differences in the ovipositors of ichneumonids are important (upper right). Some ichneumonids are nocturnal, large and colourful, and their hosts are often caterpillars of large insects The impressive *Opheltes glaucopterus* (lower left) can be found occasionally coming to light traps. One of its hosts is the larva of the Lime Hawk Moth (Bottom Right).

Ichneumon wasps often have protruding ovipositors and larger representatives have a rather menacing appearance, but they will not use the ovipositor as a weapon unless you try to pick them up. They are usually on the hunt for host species and when they locate them, insert the sharp and often toothed tip of their ovipositor (Illustrated on p 43) into immature stages of their targets (6). The infrequently recorded species here (*Rhysella approximator*) was photographed by Aaron Bhambra on the RSPB reserve whilst it was probing the holes in the standing dead Birch trunks in the garden. A common host is the wood - boring Sawfly *Xyphydria camelus* which is recorded from the Valley and may have caused the hole seen here.

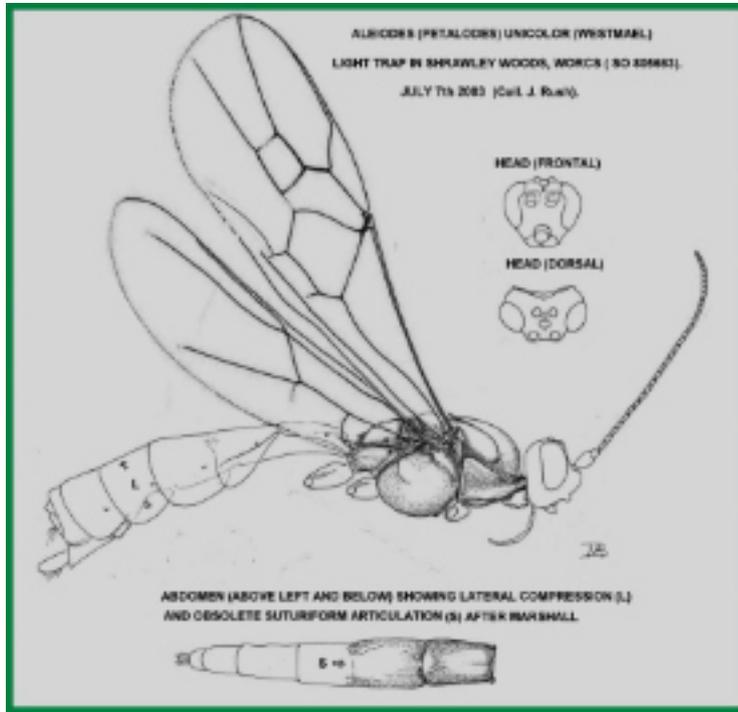


Another medium sized species rarely caught but found in the bee- bank area of the RSPB reserve is *Barylypa insidiator* (photo below by MGB) often recorded from larvae of *Panolis flammea* (Pine Beauty Moth). There is a record of this moth from Hamstead Hall Avenue (R.&A.Normand) from the estate nearby where mature pines are found. Pines at various stages of growth are found throughout the locality, but this moth does not seem to have yet reached pest status which has been the case elsewhere. *B. insidiator* is possibly an example of one of nature's control species preventing outbreaks of problem insects. Ichneumon wasps are known to have a very important role in this respect.

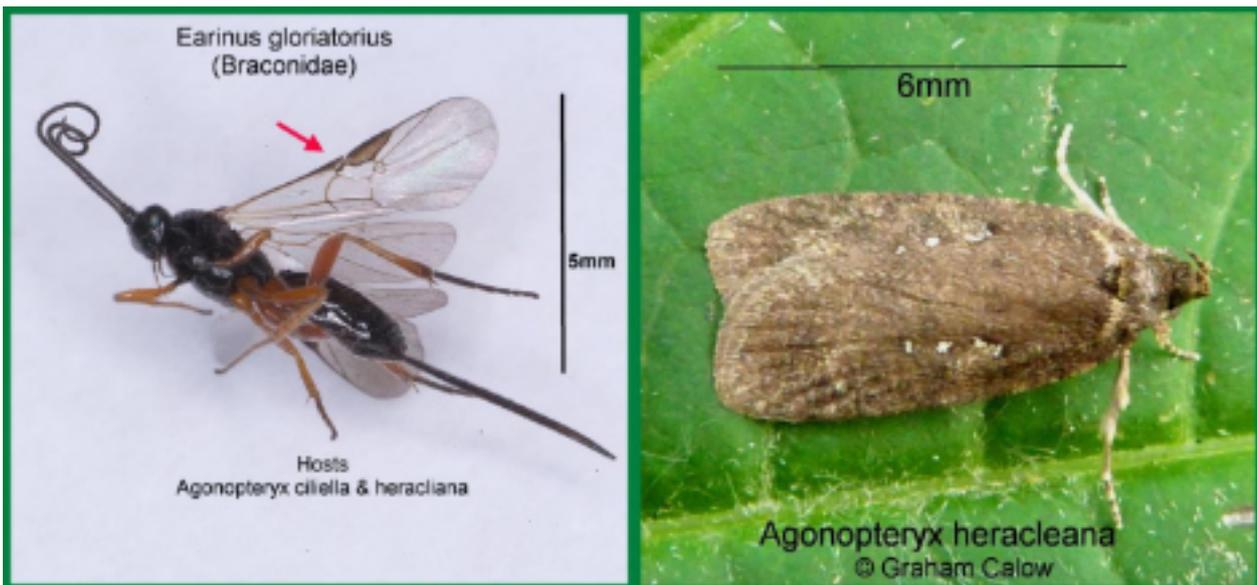


## Braconid Parasitoid Wasps

This is another large family of parasitic wasps, many of which probably act in controlling population growth in a wide range of insects. Suitable keys to help entomologists identify these are beginning to appear, but many species are small and expert help is often necessary if reliable identification is to be guaranteed. Good drawings are necessary and may be of great assistance to a specialist - as in this case.



*Earinus gloriatorius* (from Sot's Hole) is a common Braconid most probably endoparasitic on *Agonopteryx heracleana* (the Common Brindled Brown micromoth). This species is common on the RSPB Reserve and *E. gloriatorius* is likely to be present there also. The arrow indicates a wing character that is very helpful in identification of this wasp.



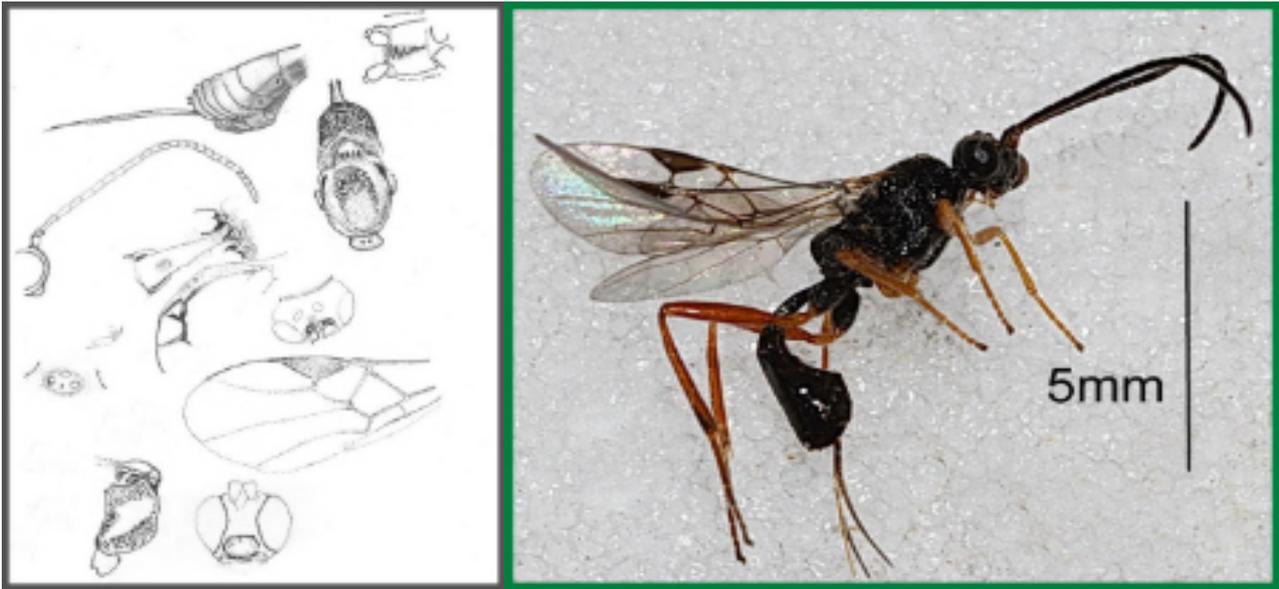
## Euphorine Braconid Parasitoid Wasps

The wasps of this small Braconid family tend to target beetles. A very well-known one was discovered by Andy Purcell. He noticed a strangely inactive Seven Spot Ladybird on a hedgerow leaf in the field adjoining the railway bridge near the RSPB Centre. Having an interest in such minute things, he potted it up, noticing what appeared to be a cocoon beneath it. On taking it home he was surprised when a tiny braconid wasp (*Dinocampus coccinellae*) emerged from it. The story is not a happy one. The wasp lays an egg in the soft body of the ladybird, and this develops, devouring the ladybird as it does so. The unfortunate host remains alive and acts as a walking shield for the developing wasp larva which finally pupates beneath it. The ladybird may remain active for some short period, but with nearly all its internal organs devoured, soon ceases to make any movement and dies.



**Top left: The newly emerged parasitoid *Dinocampus coccinellae*. Top right: a typically active Seven Spot Ladybird photographed in flight mode (Andy Purcell). Lower: the deceased host ladybird with the emerged parasitoid on the right.**

Andy Purcell may indeed be congratulated for his acute powers of observation, but Jenni Wilding has to be praised for her persuasive powers when she insisted that we capture a small uninteresting looking back wasp during Richard Orton's moth trapping event near Park Farm Wood on the night of October 7<sup>th</sup>. This was duly done and on examining the insect, I was able to discover that we had another Euphorine Braconid wasp (2). This one was a mystery because it did not key out and the only thing to do was to send the details to Dr Mark Shaw (Edinburgh) to get his opinion on our specimen.



**Anatomical sketches of SV Euphorine and photo sent to Dr Mark Shaw by MGB**

Mark is currently one of the foremost British and European authorities on Braconid wasps, but with typical modesty and alacrity he replied as follows:

‘Your euphorine is *Orionis coxator* (see attached) – only recently found in Britain but turning up in W. Europe commonly. Nobody knows host, but it should be an adult beetle; something active at this time of year. My suspicions are with vine weevil *Otiorhynchus sulcatus*, as they go off to hibernate as adults. But no evidence whatsoever! If you find lots, I would be glad of specimens for NMS... Tony Galsworthy kindly gave me one, but that is all we have.’

**My hypothesis is that another ladybird is the host. On the night, both these ladybirds were at the trap.**



**Left: Harlequin Ladybird (many varieties of this). Right: Orange Ladybird- frequent in woodland setting.**

Please examine any of these two ladybird specimens you notice, especially if they are inert and have any signs of developing unusual swellings with traces of a silky web beneath. If you tube them up with a cotton wool stopper, after a period of retention with regular observation, you might find a parasitoid emerges.

If it is *Orionis coxator*, you will win an important ecological ‘coconut’ because if the host is the Harlequin, you may be the first person to discover that this omnipresent and unwelcome visitor has a specific enemy. Any emergent wasps may be sent to me and if I am unable to deal with them, Mark most certainly will.

## More Invertebrate Reports for 2023: from Richard Orton,

In 2023, we carried out five moth trapping surveys in or close to Sandwell Valley. Three of these were at the RSPB Visitors' Centre, in May and August as part of moth nights for RSPB and a final session, which coincided with a Sandnats meeting in October. In June, we were surveying at St. Margaret's Churchyard, and were able to leave a trap running overnight as part of the Sandnats bioblitz based there (thanks to Chris Bird for arranging this). The final session of the year was a spur-of-the moment affair, inspired by the capture of a Clifden Nonpareil, a truly spectacular moth, in Warley Woods. The caterpillar of this moth is supposed to feed on aspen and probably other poplars, so we decided to try our luck near Park Farm, where poplars are abundant. We didn't catch a Clifden, but did find some beautiful autumn species such as Sallows and the aptly-named Merveille du Jour. We also caught two Box-Tree Moths, the first records for the Valley. We can expect more as they spread further into our area. There was also a rare wasp, which as you have seen, pleased Mike Bloxham no end.

In total, 210 individual moths were caught of 58 different species. Green Carpet was the most abundant, with 27 individuals. I think that two of our sessions must have coincided with the emergence of the first (May) and second (August) generations, which boosted numbers. As well as the Box-tree moths, Satin Beauty was also a new record for the Valley (marked in red). As usual, thanks are owed to the faithful 'mothers', particularly Jenni and Dave, who did a lot of the hard work and for the company of all who came to a moth night. We will repeat at least some of the surveys in 2024.

		Date	5th May	9th June	25th Aug	4th Oct	7th Jul	
	Site		RSPB V.C.	St. Margaret's CY	RSPB V.C.	RSPB V.C.	Nr. Park Farm	
Taxon	Vernacular							Total
<i>Triodia sylvina</i>	Orange Swift				15			15
<i>Korscheltellus lupulina</i>	Common Swift			6				6
<i>Hofmannophila pseudospretella</i>	Brown House-moth			1				1
<i>Carcina quercana</i>	Oak Long-horn				1			1
<i>Agonopterix arenella</i>	a moth		1					1
<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>	Light Brown Apple Moth						1	1
<i>Acleris comariana</i>	Strawberry Tortrix				1			1
<i>Patania ruralis</i>	Mother of Pearl							0
<i>Cydalima perspectalis</i>	Box-tree Moth						2	2
<i>Chrysoeuchia culmella</i>	Garden Grass-veneer			1				1
<i>Agriphila tristella</i>	a moth				3			3
<i>Agriphila straminella</i>	a moth				3			3
<i>Agriphila geniculata</i>	a moth				1			1
<i>Mimas tiliae</i>	Lime Hawk-moth			1				1
<i>Laathoe populi</i>	Poplar Hawk-moth			1				1
<i>Deilephila porcellus</i>	Small Elephant Hawk-moth			1				1
<i>Xanthorhoe designata</i>	Flame Carpet				1			1
<i>Xanthorhoe montanata</i>	Silver-ground Carpet			4				4
<i>Chloroclysta siterata</i>	Red-Green Carpet		1				1	2
<i>Dysstroma truncata</i>	Common Marbled Carpet						3	3
<i>Colostygia pectinataria</i>	Green Carpet		14		13			27
<i>Gymnoscelis rufifasciata</i>	Double-striped Pug		2					2
<i>Eupithecia abbreviata</i>	Brindled Pug		1					1
<i>Eupithecia exigua</i>	Mottled Pug			1				1
<i>Petrophora chlorosata</i>	Brown Silver-line			1				1
<i>Opisthograptis luteolata</i>	Brimstone Moth				3			3
<i>Biston betularia</i>	Peppered Moth			2				2
<i>Deileptenia ribeata</i>	Satin Beauty				4			4

<i>Cabera exanthemata</i>	Common Wave			1			1
<i>Lamographa temerata</i>	Clouded Silver		1				1
<i>Drymonia ruficornis</i>	Lunar Marbled Brown	4					4
<i>Rivula sericealis</i>	Straw Dot		3	7			10
<i>Lymantria monacha</i>	Black Arches			1			1
<i>Calliteara pudibunda</i>	Pale Tussock		1				1
<i>Phragmatobia fuliginosa</i>	Ruby Tiger			1			1
<i>Deilephila pygarga</i>	Marbled White Spot		4				4
<i>Amipipyra spp. agg.</i>	Copper Underwing egg			2			2
<i>Allophyes oxyacanthae</i>	Green-brindled Crescent				2		2
<i>Chorizanthe trigammica</i>	Treble Lines		1				1
<i>Mormo maura</i>	Old Lady			1			1
<i>Phlogothora meticulosa</i>	Angle Shades					1	1
<i>Oligia strigilis</i>	Marbled Minor egg		10				10
<i>Tiliacea aurago</i>	Barred Sallow					11	11
<i>Cirrhia icteritia</i>	Sallow					2	2
<i>Griposia aprilina</i>	Merveille du Jour					4	4
<i>Dryobotodes eremita</i>	Brindled Green					1	1
<i>Leucania comma</i>	Shoulder-striped Wainscot		3				3
<i>Agrotis exclamatoris</i>	Heart and Dart		3				3
<i>Agrotis puta</i>	Shuttle-shaped Dart	1	2				3
<i>Agrotis ipsilon</i>	Dark Sword-grass				1		1
<i>Ochropleura plecta</i>	Flame Shoulder		3	7			10
<i>Diarsia mendica</i>	Ingrailed Clay		1				1
<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	Large Yellow Underwing			10		1	11
<i>Noctua fimbriata</i>	Broad-bordered Yellow U/w			1			1
<i>Noctua comes</i>	Lesser Yellow Underwing					3	3
<i>Noctua janthe</i>	Lesser Broad-b Yellow U/w			4			4
<i>Xestia xanthographa</i>	Square-spot Rustic			17	1		18
<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>	Setaceous Hebrew Character			1		2	3
<i>Nycteola revayana</i>	Oak Nycteoline	1					1



Upper left: Merveille de Jour. Upper right: Box Moth (light form). Lower left: Box Moth (dark form). Lower right: Blue Shield Bug. Photos by Jenni Wilding.

## : Invertebrates from 2023: From Jenni Wilding

I didn't manage to get my garden moth trap out until June last year but had 14 species of micro and 25 species of macro moth on the night of 17<sup>th</sup> June. Heart and dart was the most numerous moth, and it was nice to have Elephant Hawkmoth and Bird's Wing, along with the return of Coronet. The trap went out again on three subsequent nights in September where the highlights were Yellow Shell, an Old Lady, and 19 Large Yellow Underwings on the third night. It was a case of 'saving the best till last' with my moth trapping for 2023, with the arrival of a Merveille du Jour in October as well as both dark and light forms of the Box-tree Moth. I had recorded the light form of Box-tree Moth before, but not the dark form, which has a lovely purple sheen on its wings. At the RSPB reserve, SANDNATS organised the moth trapping for the usual public bat and moth nights. The first, a rather cool night in May, saw a total of 28 moths of eight species caught, including 14 Green Carpet and four Lunar Marbled Brown as well as two Oak Nycteoline. The highlight of the evening, much enjoyed by the members of the public, was the large number of Newts in the Reflection Garden Pond. The second event, on a warmer evening in August saw 99 moths of 23 species caught, including an Old Lady, a nice selection of Yellow Underwings, Black Arches and Ruby Tiger. The most numerous species were 17 Square-spot Rustics, 15 Orange Swifts and 11 Green Carpets. In addition, a nice Violet Ground Beetle and a Gorse Shield Bug put in an appearance. The last RSPB event was a bit disappointing in terms of moths, with just four in total; two Green-brindled Crescent, a Dark Sword-grass, and a Square-spot Rustic. An improvement in the weather persuaded us to venture out again in October, this time to a path near Park Farm where we had a more successful evening with 32 moths of 12 species including 11 Barred Sallow, four Merveille du Jour, a Bridled Green and two Box-tree Moths. I also managed to pot up that interesting parasitic wasp for Mike.

Other invertebrate highlights were some new species for the RSPB Reserve that I found: the Blue Shield Bug, *Zicronia caerulea*, in April and a 'Black Colonel' soldierfly, *Odontomyia tigrina*, in June.

*The 'Black Colonel' (photographed below by Andy Purcell) is inconspicuous in the field, most likely being found in marshy areas and with very striking, blue - banded eyes in the male (photo MGB). The function of the bands is still not precisely known.*

*The advantages of carrying out observations over a longer period, with expanding invertebrate species lists for different compartments in the Valley, enable sharper focus on similarities and differences in faunal composition. Bird's Wing may join another small set of moths associated particularly with the Eastern interface of the Valley and the conurbation.*

*In the same way, the rapidly expanding invertebrate lists for Rowley Hills are already highlighting contrasting features when compared to the Valley ones – I am beginning to think that we shall never find Green Hairstreak butterfly in the Valley and given the pheromone experiments, it seems that we may not expect Six Striped Clearwing either (Ed.).*



**A provisional Checklist of Phasiinae (true bug parasite flies) in Birmingham and the Black Country with additional notes.**



**The ‘flagship’ species: *Phasia hemiptera* -photographed by Jenni Wilding.**

Many phasiines identify potential hosts through the use of specialised antennal receptors. The hosts of the species mentioned here are all true bugs. Life histories of these flies differ to a considerable extent. Eggs are usually laid by the female on host species either in the proximity of a suture in a weak spot or within the tissues using a piercer as in the genus *Phasia*. Other genera in our featured flies with well - developed piercers include *Catherosia Pygmaea* and *Cinochira atra*. The host bugs do not survive parasitism.

Phasiines serve two primary roles in the ecosystem as secondary consumers and pollinators. As secondary consumers, phasiines help regulate populations of plant damaging insects and thereby affect the health and diversity of the plants themselves. As pollinators, phasiines (in pursuit of hosts and nectar), contribute to the continued reproductive health of flowering plants and are thus important members of meadow habitats. Much remains to be discovered about these specialised flies, not least the significance of colour variations present in some of the adults. One potentially important feature is that several species exhibit colour and/or structural variation when viewed under the microscope. This may indicate a group undergoing rapid evolution. Recent study has also revealed that the Phasiine population in the British Isles is being steadily augmented by species from Europe. This may be down to ‘climate change’ but may also be attributed to greater observer coverage.

N.B. In the lists that follow, the Recorders are M.G.Bloxham and S.J.Falk. Dates are given either singly or as a range, from first to last occurrence on a site- assuming continuing presence during the intervening period.

**Phasiinae (true bug flies). 29 British species.**  
**Eleven recorded here (with known host species and distribution data).**

***Catharosia pygmaea* (Fallén,) A very scarce fly.**

Host: Several possibilities.



This small black fly with white wingtips had the distinction of being the second British record. Recorded from Ray Hall Sewage Works (West Bromwich) SP027946. 19 AUG 1995 (M.G. Bloxham). The fly was identified by P.J. Chandler (author of the Checklist of the British Isles (Diptera (5))).

This species was first recorded in the British Isles by Steven Falk -one of our greatest fly hunters and a most important contemporary British naturalist – being an expert on a wide range of creatures from birds to bees. His meticulous and sublime wildlife illustrations are well known both here and in Europe.

We are very fortunate that he was active in Warwickshire for a number of years and was able to pay special attention to entomology in Sutton Park.

***Hemyda vittata* (Meigen,) Uncommon.**

Host: *Troilus luridus* F. Bronze Shieldbug (Pentatomidae).



A smart easily recognised fly, usually at woodland margins, it is recorded from:

Sandwell Valley - Priory Woods N. SP023915. (M.G. Bloxham).

Sandwell Valley - Bluebell Wood. SP01799271(M.G. Bloxham).

Sutton Park (Pool Hollies area) SP10259773 (S.J. Falk).

***Lophosia fasciata* (Meigen,) very uncommon.**

Host: *Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale* L. Hawthorn Shieldbug (Pentatomidae).



A distinctive and characteristic parasite fly with wing bands assisting identification. Given the abundance of its host, it's a surprise that it is recorded so infrequently. The record set does suggest that well-established woodland is preferred. Recorded from a single site. Walsall- Cuckoo's Nook SP 0541 9876). 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> July 2008 (M.G. Bloxham).

***Phania funesta* (Meigen.) Common Splay-Wing.**

Host: *Legnotus limbosus* (Hemiptera: Cydnidae) and probably other small ground bugs.



Tiny fly (c 4mm) Abundant and often swept from wildflowers in a variety of open situations. Expert identification advised.  
Birmingham Eastside (7 sites) SP 0885. May 2004- Aug 2007.  
Birmingham Eastside-Land at Vincent Drive SP04278334. June 2003 to Aug 2003.  
Minworth -Farmland adj. Park Hall Farm SP16419090.  
19<sup>th</sup> Jul 2007.  
Sandwell Valley - RSPB Reserve SP032927. 26<sup>th</sup> Apr 2017.

Recorder: M.G. Bloxham.

***Cinochira atra* (Zetterstedt) common**

Hosts: *Drymus brunneus* (Sahlb.), *D. sylvaticus* (Fall.), *Scolopostethus decoratus* (Hahn), *S. thomsoni* (Reut), *Eremocoris plebejus* (Fall.), (Lygaeidae).

**No Photo or picture available**

An elusive small dark fly obtained by sweeping and Malaise traps.  
Birmingham Eastside -Land adjacent to canal SP08038696. May 2004- Aug 2006. M.G. Bloxham.  
Sandwell Valley - Bluebell Wood SP01799271.23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2018. M.G. Bloxham.  
Sandwell Valley - Priory Woods N SP023915.28<sup>th</sup> Sep 2001. M.G. Bloxham.  
Walsall- Cuckoo's Nook SP05419876. 17<sup>th</sup> Jun 2008. M.G. Bloxham.  
Sutton Park (general Area) SP098974. 5<sup>th</sup> Sep 1996 - 8<sup>th</sup> Jul 1997. S.J. Falk.

***Cistogaster globosa* (Fabricius.) Rare but rapidly expanding its territory.**

Hosts: *Aelia acuminata* (L), on continent also *A. rostrata* (Boh.) and *A. sibirica* (Reut.) (Pentatomidae).



There is spectacular sexual dimorphism in this species- The female (left: photo from Stourbridge by Lucas Large) is predominantly black, while the male (centre: photo M. Bloxham) is richly marked with gold - dusted orange. The host in Britain seems to be the Bishop's Mitre Shieldbug (right: photo Jenni Wilding). The dimorphism mentioned is not infrequent in true flies, but the extent of black colouration of the male abdomen in this species is very variable. This phenomenon in another Phasiine species will be re-visited shortly. The species has undergone a remarkable expansion of its range in the country during recent times- possibly because of climatic factors, so a status reduction may be anticipated. The genome of this species has been studied (3).

Pelsall North Common SK 0203 0454 1<sup>st</sup> Aug 2022. M.G.Bloxham.

***Phasia pusilla* (Meigen.) common**

Hosts: Various Lygaeidae, Cydnidae and Anthocoridae.

**A tiny black fly needing microscopic examination to see important features.**

An important character in separating this fly from its close relative *P. barbifrons* (see below) is the colour of its halteres which are dark. Halteres are sophisticated balance organs that oscillate during flight. The halteres are clearly visible as the small 'drumstick' shaped structures behind the wings. Halteres are modified hind wings and are used for balance when in flight. The picture with *P. barbifrons* will clarify this further.



Sandwell Valley - Bluebell Wood SP01799271. 25<sup>th</sup> Sep- 6<sup>th</sup> Oct 2018. M.G.B.  
Sandwell Valley - Park Lane Wood.SP026908. 24<sup>th</sup> Aug 1992. M.G.B.  
Birmingham Eastside-Jennens Road/Lawley Middleway. SP08038752. 11<sup>th</sup> May 2004 to 27<sup>th</sup> Jul 2007. M.G.B.  
Birmingham Eastside - Vincent Drive. SP042833. 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 2003. M.G.B.  
Walsall (Mill Lane) SP017999. 29<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> Jul 2007. M.G.B.  
Brownhills - Holland Park (57) SK036064. 25<sup>th</sup> Jun 2000. M.G.B.  
Sutton Park (general Area) SP098974. 7<sup>th</sup> Sep 1996 to 4<sup>th</sup> Aug 1997. S.J. Falk.

***Phasia barbifrons* (Girschner) Common (4).**

Hosts: Various- including Blue Shield Bug *Zicrona caerulea* (Pentatomidae).

**Another tiny black fly needing microscopic examination to see important features.**



This fly went unrecognised in collections for some years, being usually allocated to *P. pusilla*. On seeing it recorded by Steven Falk in 2018, I checked my voucher specimens and changed the two mentioned below to *P. barbifrons*. Without specimens there would have been no possibility of ever correcting these identifications. Here the haltere is yellow and a distinctive primary character in identification.

Sutton Park (general Area). SP098974. Summer 2018. S.J. Falk.  
Sandwell Valley - Bluebell Wood SP0179 9271.14<sup>th</sup> Jun 2018. M.G.Bloxham.  
West Bromwich Wedgewood RD SO985 932. 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012. M.G.Bloxham.

***Phasia hemiptera* (Fabricius.) common**

Hosts: *Palomena prasina* (L.) Green Shieldbug and *P. Rufipes* (L.) 'Forest Bug' (Pentatomidae)



The wings of the male (illustrated) have beautiful brown and violet markings. The wings of the female are unmarked, giving the impression that another species is involved. Two of the host species – the Green Shieldbug (photo by Jenni Wilding on the right) and the Forest Bug are both abundant and generally distributed.

Sandwell Valley. 1, St. John's Close. SP017910. 15<sup>th</sup> Jun 1996 to 14<sup>th</sup> Jul 2012. M.G.Bloxham  
Walsall- Cuckoo's Nook. SP05419876. 7<sup>th</sup> Aug 2008. M.G.Bloxham.  
Sandwell Valley. Park Lane Wood SP026908. 30<sup>th</sup> Jul 1999. M.G.Bloxham  
Sandwell .Valley. Orchard Pool SP021914. 20<sup>th</sup> Oct 1991. M.G.Bloxham.

### **Phasia hemiptera distribution continued:**

Sandwell Valley - Priory Woods N SP023915.23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2001. M.G.Bloxham.

Sandwell Valley - Sot's Hole SP011923. 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 1992. M.G.Bloxham.

Sutton Park (general area) SP098974. 4<sup>th</sup> Aug 1997. S.J.Falk.

### **Phasia obesa (Fabricius,) common.**

Hosts: *Neottiglossa pusilla* (Gm.) 'Small Grass Shieldbug', *Zicrona caerulea* (L.) (Pentatomidae); *Myrmus miriformis* (Fall.) (Coreidae); *Leptopterna dolabrata* (L.) *Lygus pratensis* L. (Miridae).



*Phasia obesa* (left) with a common host - the Small Grass Shieldbug (photo: Tristan Bantock).

Brownhills Common (64) SK039060. 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 1999. M.G. Bloxham.

Brownhills - Holland Park (58) SK039062 25<sup>th</sup> Sep 2000. M.G. Bloxham.

Sandwell Valley - Park Lane Wood SP026908. 17<sup>th</sup> Aug 1990 to 1<sup>st</sup> Sep 1991. M.G. Bloxham.

Sandwell Valley - Footprint Pool SP02259222.20<sup>th</sup> Aug 1987. M.G. Bloxham.

Walsall -College Farm. SP03009963.28<sup>th</sup> Jun 2002. M.G. Bloxham.

Sandwell Valley - Ray Hall Sewage Works 3 SP029946. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sep 1993. M.G. Bloxham.

Sutton Park (general Area) SP098974. 5<sup>th</sup> Sep 1996 to 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 1997. S.J. Falk.

### **Subclytia rotundiventris (Fallén.) Very local.**

Hosts: *Elasmucha grisea* (L.) Parent Bug ; in Europe on Pentatomidae: *Elasmotethus interstinctus* (L.) *Cyphostethus tristriatus* (F.) and *Piezodorus lituratus* (Fabr.).

Sandwell Valley - Bluebell Wood SP01799271 13<sup>th</sup> June – 27<sup>th</sup> Aug 2018. M.G. Bloxham.

Sandwell Valley - Priory Pool (298) SP02509140 2<sup>nd</sup> Sep 1991. M.G. Bloxham.

Pool Hollies area (Sutton Park) SP10259773.4<sup>th</sup> Aug 1997. S.J.Falk.



### **The Malaise Trap in Bluebell Wood SP01799271 during 2018.**

Bluebell Wood was once designated by English Nature as potentially the best fragment of original wildwood in the Sandwell Valley. A detailed survey of its invertebrates had not been previously carried out before this date, so a Malaise tent trap was set up early in the year to sample them. The 'tent' is open sided and made of dark material so insects venturing in are drawn upwards to the light at the opening to the two bottles, The lower one (arrowed) contains a 'knock out' agent and this gives a yield of voucher specimens for analysis.

This methodology is very useful for evaluating invertebrate biodiversity, but its success can lead to considerable ecological objections from conservationists unless it is used sparingly and the periods of use are

carefully recorded. This practice was carried out here and for much of the year, the lower bottle was removed, allowing invertebrates rising up in the tent to escape. The relevance of this to *Subclytia rotundiventris* becomes apparent, because emergence of this fly took place from June to August and provided some fascinating material for analysis of variations noticed.

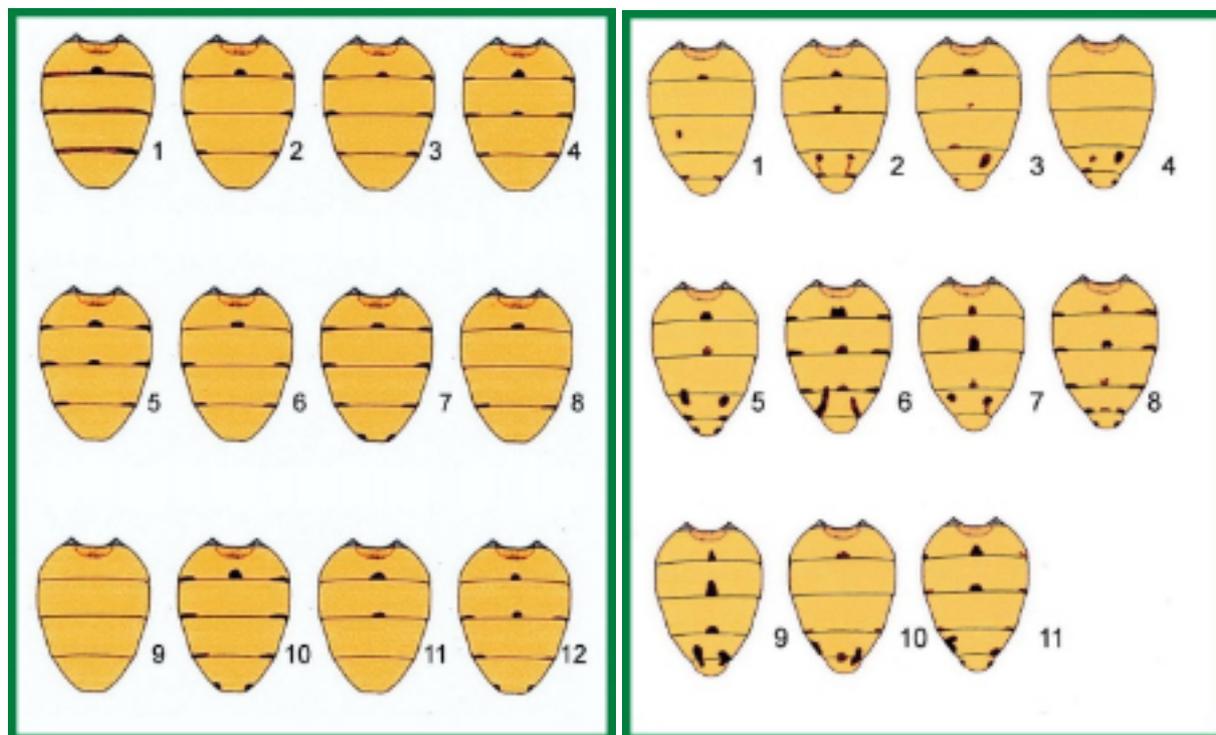
**The discovery of Anomalies in the specimens discovered in the Malaise Trap catch.**



In nearly all occasions when insects emerge as adults into the world there will be casualties for a variety of reasons. The *S. rotundiventris* specimen here has two unexpected wing vein breaks and these may well affect the flexing, leading to impaired flight efficiency. Readers examining the picture here will also have noted the black dot on the abdominal segment. Similar markings have been noted on abdomens of the related *Cistogaster globosa* (p53). Having this in mind, I decided to chart the abdominal markings of all the *S. rotundiventris* specimens recovered from the trap. There is nothing new about this. It has been

used on countless occasions with different insects often to see if it significantly influenced their taxonomy (naming). Much naming is given in accordance with well-defined physical differences, but colouring phenomena often carry less significance for many reasons (such as seasonal variability- a fascinating topic on its own). What the charts here tell us is open for debate, but they do contribute as ‘citizen science’ in that others may find them valuable in pursuit of more profound studies of this fly or wider related concepts.

**Chart 1. The markings of female tergites (segments). Upper: 1+2, next below 3, next 4 and lowest- 5.**  
**Chart 2. (right) male tergites. Upper:1+2, next below 3, next 4, next 5, lowest: Hypopygium.**



The hypopygium is a complex containing the male terminalia. The study of these is often of key importance in the accurate naming of a species because they may contain unique structures. In conclusion it seems genitalic examination of all the males involved here is the next step. Who knows what it may show? I would guess that no new species has been discovered in Bluebell Wood! What would be most pleasing is any observations from readers regarding these expeditions into the ‘jungle’ of Bluebell wood and (of course) notification of errors noticed in the content of this edition.

## References.

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## Captions and Photographers

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Top left: Broad- leaved Helleborine (MGB). Top right: Green-winged Orchid (Knapp) (AJP)  
 Lower left: mosses & lichens at RSPB (MGB). Lower right: Sandnats on S.V. Orchid Meadow (AJP),.

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Top left: Cornflower (AJP). Top right: Broomrape (MGB).  
 Centre left: Thorn Apple (MP). Centre right: Corncockle (AJP).  
 Lower left: Waxcap *Hygrocybe helobia* (AJP). Lower right: *Geoglossum* sp. an Earth Tongue (MGB).

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Top left: Good King Henry (MP). Top right: West Bromwich Mayor and Terry Jukes (Sandwell Park Farm) talk to Andy Purcell during our Library Exhibition of 1978 (photographer Tony Wood?).  
 Lower left: Birch at Bromwich Hall (E W Bloxham). Lower right: Beech at rear of Pear Tree Drive (MGB).

## PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME 2024

**NB. Final details of these meetings may be found in our newsletters and on the website.**

APR 20 <sup>th</sup> (11am)	Sandwell Valley Archaeology	Mike Hodder
APR 27 <sup>th</sup> (11am)	Sot's Hole and Millennium Plantation	Val Edkins & Mike Poulton
MAY 12 <sup>th</sup> (10 am)	Oak House Bioblitz	Mike Poulton
JUNE 1 <sup>st</sup> (4pm)	Members' Bird Watch at RSPB Sandwell Valley	RSPB
JUNE 1 <sup>st</sup> (7pm)	Indoor Social at RSPB Centre following Bird Watch	Participants
JUNE 15 <sup>th</sup> (TBA)	Saltwells Nature Reserve	Senior Countryside Ranger
JULY 20 <sup>th</sup> (TBA)	Pond Survey (Cascade & Icehouse SV)	Sandnats Members
AUG 17 <sup>th</sup> (11am)	Park Lime Pits / Rushall Canal	Richard Orton /Gill Barnard
OCT 2 <sup>nd</sup> (7pm)	World of the Hedgehog	Shirley Hancock (*RSPB)
NOV 6 <sup>th</sup> (7pm)	Moths	Richard Orton (*RSPB)
DEC 4 <sup>th</sup> 7pm	Christmas Social	Members and Friends (*RSPB)

RSPB address: Tanhouse Ave, Birmingham B43 5AG (Phone: 0121 357 7395)  
\*Denotes an indoor meeting.

## 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 have a duty to abide by any regulations issued by Sandwell MBC with regard to local activities and are diligent to observe any procedures required when on site elsewhere in the country. Members and visitors are therefore requested to comply to the best of their ability with any special instructions issued by leaders on these matters when outdoor or indoor meetings are in progress.



*Rear cover: RSPB Reserve in spring (overhead photo by Andy Purcell)*

Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant king,  
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,  
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing:  
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo...

Thomas Nashe (1567-1601)