

# SALISBURY & DISTRICT NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



## BULLETIN July 2019

[www.salisburynaturalhistory.com](http://www.salisburynaturalhistory.com)

### Outdoor meetings

<b>JULY</b> Saturday 6th	<b>MOTHING MORNING.</b> Porton 1000-1200 Once again John Muggleton has kindly agreed to identify the moths caught overnight in the 2 traps that have been placed in Porton.
Friday 12th	<b>LAVERSTOCK. Cockey Down.</b> Looking for Glow Worms. Meet at Murphy's Factory car park next to St Joseph's School playing field, Church Road at 9.15 pm. Bring a torch and have suitable footwear for rough uphill walking. We will go slowly and not a great distance. There is a possibility of cattle grazing the area and we should watch out for cow-pats.
<b>AUGUST</b> Sunday 4th	<b>WINTERBOURNE DOWNS.</b> An afternoon walk around this chalk grassland reserve and we will encounter a riot of colour with wild flowers and clouds of butterflies including dark green fritillaries and marbled whites. We may be lucky to see the secretive and well camouflaged stone-curlew on the plots in front of the viewing screens. Meet at 1400 hours in the reserve car park on Station Road at GR SU214401. From Salisbury turn right off the A 338 just opposite the Old Inn public house signed Newton Tony, the reserve entrance is approximately one mile along at the top of the hill on the left.

**Sunday 18.08.2019. Dstl, Porton Down.** A combined **Fungus Recording Day** with the S&DNHS and Hampshire Fungus Recording Group, to identify the fungi observed. Meet at **10.00h** outside the Conservation Museum, GR SU 208 369 (post code SP4 0JQ(G)). This can be a half day or whole day trip leaving by 15.30h. Bring snack lunch if you wish to stay for the afternoon. No facilities on the range. From Salisbury take the A30 north east for 6.5 miles and at the double set of traffic lights turn left, signed Porton. After 2 miles turn right signed Dstl (& HPA), and continue straight over the top of the hill and immediately go left into the parking area for the Conservation Museum which is the small building furthest left. Please be able to walk on rough muddy & uneven ground on grass and in woodland and wear suitable clothes and sturdy footwear. To book a place please complete the booking form and return it to A McKee **before the 18th July** as a security check is required by the MOD or entry will be refused.

### Past Field Meetings

#### 9<sup>th</sup> June 2019

8 members enjoyed a ramble around Blackmoor Copse with warden Rod Poynton. Rod took the group along less used paths and explained the coppicing and clearing which have been carried out. The main object of the visit was to view the newly renovated pond, the Society having contributed to the cost of the renovation which took place last autumn. The pond is maturing well and plant life is quickly establishing at the margins, including yellow flags. Several damsel flies were seen, also a chaser dragon fly. Several newts were visible when they surfaced for air and Rod assured us that the Crested Newts were doing well.

## **16th June 2019**

The stroll round Figsbury went better than expected. It was quite overcast and very windy. Nine of us turned up not expecting too much, but the showers held off and we ended up with a very reasonable list of species.

Chalk downland flowers were well represented with Dropwort, Fairy Flax, Common and Chalk milkworts, Quaking Grass, Yellow Rattle and Ladies Bedstraw. There was also Common Birdsfoot Trefoil, Kidney Vetch and Horseshoe Vetch in quantity which is why the site is so good for Blue butterflies. Five species of orchid were seen. The White Helleborine under the Beech in the car park were going to seed but Pyramidal, Common Spotted and Fragrant were in full bloom. The highlight of the day was when Sue Griffin found a beautiful Bee Orchid and Ailsa McKee spotted another one a minute or so later.

Due to the weather we hadn't expected to see many butterflies but in the event there were ten Common Blues seen as well as Adonis Blue, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Green Hairstreak, Large Skipper, Small Heath and Meadow Brown with the highlights being One Dark Green Fritillary and one Marbled White. Both quite early in their flight seasons. Moths seen were Yellow Shell, Cinnabar and Five-spot Burnet. Birds included a distant Buzzard, Skylark, Swifts, and Swallows.

Thanks to everyone who came.

**Photographic and Art Competitions for 2019.** Members are reminded of the two autumn competitions - the annual photographic competition, for which entries are required at the October indoor meeting, and the Stanley Gill art competition, for which entries are required at the November AGM meeting. For the photographic competition, members are invited to submit one recent photograph in each of up to nine classes: Animals; Birds; Invertebrates; Plants and Trees; Fungi; Geology; Scenery of Natural History Interest; Society Activities; and Miscellaneous (not covered by the other classes). Entries are to be in print form no larger than 7 inches by 5 inches and must have the member's name and the class for which entered clearly written on the reverse. The name of the subject should be shown on the front of each print, unless it is obvious from the photo. Members are reminded that any prints received which are larger than 7 X 5 inches will be excluded from the competition. The entries are to be brought to the 17th October meeting in a self-addressed envelope (no stamp). The winners will be selected by the votes of the members present at the November Annual General Meeting and names will be announced at the 19th December indoor meeting. Three winning entries will be declared in each class, although no member will be awarded more than one prize in the competition. Potential entrants unable to attend the October meeting should try to arrange for another member to hand in their entry. For the Stanley Gill art competition, members are invited to submit up to two pieces of their own work in any medium (art or craft) on a natural history theme. These entries should be brought to the November AGM meeting, where they will be judged by the votes of members present at the AGM. Winners (first, second and third) will be announced at the 19th December meeting and prizes presented. The Stanley Gill trophy will be awarded to the winner and small prizes will go to the authors of the second and third placed entries. Potential entrants unable to attend the AGM should arrange for another member to take their entries to the meeting and pick them up again after the voting.

**Photographs for Barbara Carter's Talk.** Mrs Barbara Carter has kindly again agreed to present the January 2020 compilation of members' photographs taken on field trips during the year 2019. This is a popular roundup of the year's outings, providing good information on what we see, and where, especially for those who have missed meetings and for our newer members. The material is also archived in the Society's records for future researchers. But Barbara needs help from the photographers in our Society to enable her to put together a good show. It would be much appreciated if members taking photographs on field meetings could send copies to Barbara, together with a note of the subject matter and on which trip they were taken. Barbara does a lot of research to prepare an accurate description of the material depicted and would appreciate it if members could ensure they have identified their subject matter correctly. Other members may be able to help in this respect. Photos may be provided on disk, memory stick or as email attachments to Barbara.

## **Botany**

June has been quite a busy month botanically with a weekend visit to North Devon, a day spent at Parsonage Down National Nature Reserve, recording at various Protected Roadside Verges and continuing recording for the National Plant Atlas Project. In Devon with Wiltshire Botanical Society we visited Braunton Burrows, one of the largest sand dune ecosystems in Britain with a very wide range of habitats and species, including many rarities. These

include Water Germander (*Teucrium scordium*) which needs bare damp sandy conditions and had declined on the site as the places in which it grew had become overgrown. Some of these have therefore been excavated to create the right conditions and the species is now recovering. Other plants with which many of us are familiar from the New Forest, such as Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) and Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) are also benefiting from this habitat management. We were too early to see the Marsh Helleborines (*Epipactis palustris*) in flower, but there were large numbers of Southern Marsh (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) and Pyramidal Orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) with good populations of Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*) in places. Of particular note were some very beautiful Early Marsh Orchids (*D. incarnata ssp. coccinea*), a coastal sub-species that is vivid red in colour. A sub-species of Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor ssp. curtisii*) was first identified at the site and is otherwise found only on sandy acidic heaths in the Breckland in Norfolk. Ironically, given its species name, it has petals of only two colours, yellow and white. We were also fortunate to see the rare Petalwort (*Petalophyllum ralfsii*), a liverwort found in dune slacks, probably only visible because of heavy rain the day before. Had it not been for an expert from English Nature spending some time with his nose to the ground in an area where he had seen it before, we would never have found it. Through a lens, it looks like a very miniature lettuce. On our second day we went to woodlands at Watersmeet in the Exmoor National Park where the highlight was the abundant Irish Spurge (*Euphorbia hyberna*). Heavy rain deterred us from visiting the rare Whitebeams (*Sorbus* spp.) as these are often to be found in precarious positions on cliffs and steep slopes, so unfortunately, we did not see the Watersmeet Whitebeam (*S. admonitor*). This tree was given its scientific name because the first one identified had a 'No Parking' sign attached to it!

The chalk downland on the Parsonage Down Reserve is very species rich and we saw plenty of Fragrant (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and Pyramidal (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) Orchids and a few Common Spotted (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) together with two Frog Orchids (*Coeloglossum viride*) and a couple of Bee Orchids, but were too late for the Burnt Orchids (*Neotinea ustulata*). Closer to home, the Lizard Orchid (*Himantoglossum hircinum*) on the Lime Kiln Way site in Harnham is currently flowering again and I know a number of members have been to seek it out. John Notman reports that Common Spotted Orchids were more frequent than usual on Martin Down on May 31<sup>st</sup> and although the Burnt Orchids were not plentiful, there was one group with twelve flowering spikes. He tells me that the Field Fleawort (*Tephrosia integrifolia*) there has had a good year. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June he observed Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) in the Draining Field, a plant he had never noticed in the wood before. This delicate little plant is virtually impossible to find unless it is flowering, so it is easy to miss.

I have been out plant recording with a fellow botanist in the south-east of the county around East Knoyle, Hindon and Sutton Veny to fill in some gaps in coverage. There have been some fields with abundant Corn Poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*) making a very colourful sight, but we have also found a few Yellow-juiced Poppies (*P. lecoqii*) that are a much more orange-red rather than bright scarlet. These used to be classified as a sub-species of the Long-headed Poppy (*P. dubium*) but have now been accorded species status. Both have long, narrow seed capsules, but as its name suggests, the latex in *P. lecoqii* is yellow rather than white. I have had a thriving population of the Yellow-juiced Poppy in my garden for many years. Their flowers seem to be very short-lived, opening in the morning and dropping by about midday, possibly after they have been fertilised by bees.

Penny Theobald sent me a picture of a mystery plant with a deep pink flower that had appeared in her garden and the nearest I could come to an identification was a *Silene*, possibly *S. armeria*, the Sweet-William Catchfly. This is an attractive non-native plant that I have grown in the past. Another member, Ann Tanner has reported a number of plants that she has seen growing in and around Salisbury, the Town Path and the water meadows, including a Figwort growing out of the stonework along Water Lane. There are two frequent species in our area, the Common Figwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*) and Water Figwort (*S. auriculata*). The first which has square but unwinged stems is common in woods and on hedge-banks, while the second is usually by water and in marshy habitats. It is often taller, has conspicuously winged stems and leaves with more rounded tips. I have the Common Figwort in my garden, some of which is currently being defoliated by Mullein Moth larvae. The 'fig' in Figwort is an old name for piles. Both protuberances on its roots and its globular red flower buds were thought to resemble this affliction and the plants were used to treat piles and scrofula, the 'King's Evil'.

## Entomology

This month's report is necessarily brief as I have spent much of the month around Kamchatka and the neighbouring islands in the Russian Far East. This is one of the most remote parts of the world and with birch trees just coming into leaf in mid-June. Other than seaweed flies (*Coelopa* spp.) there was not much insect life although I did manage to photograph two moths, yet to be identified.

I have not received many butterfly records and I understand that while we have been away it has not been good butterfly weather. On the Society's website, Penny Theobald (PT) records two Small Tortoiseshells on red valerian in her garden in Laverstock on the 6<sup>th</sup> June. Later she saw six on red valerian in her garden on the 21<sup>st</sup> June. Also, on the 21<sup>st</sup> June she saw Small Tortoiseshell at the Community Farm in Laverstock along with Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Marbled White and Common Blue butterflies. PT also saw a Marbled White on Cockey Down on the 19<sup>th</sup> June. John Notman (JN) found Speckled Wood, Common Blue, Dingy Skipper and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in Bentley Wood on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June. It is good to know that the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is still hanging on in this its last Wiltshire site. On a visit I made to the Draining Field in Bentley Wood on the 28<sup>th</sup> June there were large numbers of Meadow Browns visiting bramble flowers. Also present were Small Heath, Marbled White, Common Blue, Large Skipper and one Painted Lady. There have already been over one thousand sightings of the Painted Lady in the UK reported to Butterfly Conservation this year, so this is a butterfly to look out for. Details of the butterflies seen during the Society's meeting at Figsbury Ring on 16<sup>th</sup> June are given in David Lawman's report on page 2.

The first Azure Damselflies to appear in our garden in Wilton were on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June when both male and female were present. JN saw Azure and Large Red Damselflies in Bentley Wood on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June together with a Broad-bodied Chaser.

A few day-flying moths have been reported. JN saw the Speckled Yellow and Cinnabar in Bentley Wood on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June. PT saw a Scarlet Tiger in her garden on the 19<sup>th</sup> June and a Burnet Companion moth at Laverstock Community Farm on the 21<sup>st</sup> June. A Scarlet Tiger was seen in Bentley Wood on the 30<sup>th</sup> June by Guy Broome. Rather unseasonably I found a nearly fully grown Cinnabar caterpillar on ragwort in Bentley Wood on the 30<sup>th</sup> June and on the same day freshly emerged adults were present. More day flying moths were seen during the Society's visit to Figsbury Ring.

This is a good time of the year to look for beetles visiting flowers, especially ox-eye daisy, wild rose and various umbellifers. Look out in particular for longhorn beetles, chafers, click beetles, soldier beetles, ladybirds and species such as the Common Malachite Beetle (*Malachius bipustulatus*) and the Swollen Thigh Beetle (*Oedemera nobilis*). Both of the latter were found in Bentley Wood by JN on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June.

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## **Ornithology**

During the second half of May, Portland enjoyed almost daily sightings of Golden Orioles, as they headed north on their spring migration to their breeding sites. Sadly, as far as I know, none of these sites will be here in Britain. They used to breed in very small numbers in East Anglia; when I started birding, Fordham in Norfolk was the place to go to see them and see them I did. Standing on a bridge over the river, the Orioles could be seen as they flew over the river before landing in the poplars on the far bank. It always amazed me how difficult it was to see such a colourful bird amongst the dappled sunlight on the poplar leaves. After a few years they vanished from Fordham, leaving, as far as I know, Lakenheath Fen, now an RSPB reserve, as their only breeding site in this country. Ten years ago, I was there and a pair of Orioles was nesting in a poplar tree on the plantation edge, giving excellent views, as the parents frequently visited the nest to feed the chicks. Indeed, an enterprising RSPB official was on hand near the nest site selling Golden Oriole pin badges to the assembled throng. Sadly, for the next couple of years only a single Oriole arrived in the spring and to my knowledge that was the end of Golden Orioles as breeding birds in this country.

Fortunately, it's not all bad news. In West Sussex, the owners of the Knepp Estate have abandoned farming there and are allowing the land to re-wild with amazing success, over a relatively short space of time. The land held 16 pairs of Turtle Doves in 2017, whilst in 2013, 34 Nightingale territories were recorded and for the lepidopterists the estate holds the highest concentrations of Purple Emperors in the country. Hopefully, history will be made there this year; a pair of White Storks are nesting there and if the attempt is successful it will be the first White Stork chicks raised in this country for four centuries!

Early in June I looked out of my window and there, on the seed feeder, was a Goldfinch. This in itself might not seem unusual, but it is the first finch I have seen on my feeders in the eight months that the feeders have been present. Amazingly, a few days later, a Greenfinch was also feeding on the seed. Just like buses!

Penny Theobald tells me that a male Reed Bunting regularly feeds on the ground beneath her feeders, once being joined by a female. A pair of Bullfinches also regularly grace her garden. She also enjoyed a slightly drizzly day on Brownsea Island recently. Amongst the many birds present she saw good numbers of Avocets, Spoonbills and nesting Sandwich Terns.

During May, Granville Pictor recorded 17 Firecrests in Langley Wood and saw 5 Redstarts in Franchises Wood. Firecrests are one of the success stories of the past few years, especially in and around the New Forest, where they are doing very well indeed. He also saw 2 Peregrines at Shearwater. Into June, Granville saw 2 Nightjars at Common

Plantation, Alderbury, as well as a roding Woodcock. He saw a Tree Pipit and a Firecrest in Chase Woods, whilst he recorded 6 more Firecrests and a Spotted Flycatcher in Grovely Woods.

Around my garden it seems that breeding birds have done well this year. I have seen Robins, Blackbirds, masses of House Sparrows, Starlings, Blue and Great Tits and a Song Thrush all feeding young. However, I am concerned that this may not be the case in the wider countryside because the unseasonably cold, wet and windy weather came at just the wrong time for breeding birds; the cold restricts the number of insects available to feed to the chicks and if the chicks get too wet they will chill and die. Hopefully, I am being too pessimistic.

## **Zoology**

Hedgehogs seem to be doing well in this area. There have been reports from several gardens, and we regularly see one or more in ours in Laverstock. John Notman wrote on our Society's Blog about what this year's visitor to his garden likes to eat – not the purchased hedgehog food! It likes peanuts, suet pellets and sunflower hearts. Our visitors also get sunflower hearts, meal-worms and chicken scraps from our roast. The expensive hedgehog food I bought is finished, and they won't get any more as they are quite happy with cheaper fare. One came hurrying up right to my feet, before turning round and finding another route to the food.

Rosemary Nicholls told me that a polecat had been spotted in Alderbury and another was seen on the other side of the Alderbury bypass.

Coming away from a concert in aid of swift nest boxes, Jan Lockett and I watched bats flying rapidly over and under Crane Street Bridge. We were joined by Sue Walker and Tony Goddard, who told us that they were probably Daubentons, which are also called Water Bats. Look out for them if you are passing that way as it is getting dark.

I have seen hares twice this month. The first sighting was a good one, with the hare not far away on a slope below Cockey Down. Then there were about eight in a field on the west side of the A345, but they were very distant and I didn't get a good view of them.

We had the opportunity to visit Brownsea recently and the red squirrels were on feeders by the Villa. They have become quite tame and came right up to a friend sitting eating a biscuit. She didn't give it any so as not to encourage them.

Now that it is light so late, I had to wait until 9.40 to see a Noctule bat leaving its roost in the electricity pole near the Bourne at the Laverstock Sports Club. While waiting to see if another bat would come out, I saw a water vole swim across the river. Earlier in the month another swam across at the same hour. I wondered if they had become more nocturnal to escape the predatory heron that hangs about the bank during the day.

Finally, on our Society's field trip to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's Blackmoor Copse to see the renovated King Charles pond, many newts were coming to the pond surface briefly to breathe. With only a brief sighting it was not possible to identify them – a difficult task at the best of times.