

Chichester Natural History Society

Registered Charity No 259211



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NEWSLETTER No 199 February 2021

FROM THE CHAIR

As we see the first signs of Spring emerging, as shown by the first entries on our phenology sheet, it's also excellent news that the UK COVID vaccination rollout continues apace. Hopefully, therefore, the Society's activities will be able to fully re-start, later in the Spring, when it is safe to do so.

Whilst we have not been able to run the Society at full speed, I must thank those committee members who have enabled us to continue a varied set of activities. I hope you have enjoyed our Zoom evening lectures. I was captivated by the January session on the Bar Headed Goose and I received very good reports on the February presentation by Gabby Crisp, from the National Trust, on the Northwood project (an unfortunate minor bicycle accident prevented me from attending that one!)

Alongside these formal events, I have been pleased that members are using the Society's camera trap to observe the nocturnal wildlife in their gardens. I also hope that many of you are keenly recording the first sighting of species on your phenology sheets, as every record helps. It's also nice to hear about members' observations on the web-site Blog.

Looking forward, a good number of proposals have been submitted by members for the use of our legacy funds. The committee will be reviewing these in the next few weeks, to decide which to take forward.

We will steadily restart our activities as the government changes the lockdown restrictions (**update on February 22nd - see Field Outings below**), so hopefully this will enable us to get together in the near future. Until then, please keep safe and enjoy observing wildlife locally (filling in your phenology sheets as you do so!)

Hope to "see" many of you at our next evening lecture, on the fascinating subject of Moths!

Dr. Christian Hance.

chair@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk

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MEMBERS

New Members

We Welcome the following new members:

Mrs Jennie Aitchison

Ms C Salamons

Mrs GM Abbott

Unpaid Membership Subscriptions. Any members who have not paid their 2020/21 subscriptions will be removed from the Society's mailing list. If you are unsure if you have paid your subs, please contact Heather Hart, Membership Secretary.

2021 Photographic Competition

The Photographic Competition for 2021 has the theme of Garden Wildlife.

Entries will be displayed at the Members' Christmas Meeting in December 2021 if COVID restrictions allow the event, otherwise entries will be displayed on the CNHS Website. Please send your submissions to web-master@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk by 1 December 2021.

Sightings

Please enter any observations in the sightings book on lecture evenings or add them to the blog on the website.

Publicity

We have purchased some promotional lapel badges and some car stickers to advertise our existence. They can be obtained at lecture evenings at £1 for a badge and all members receive a free car sticker.

EVENTS – ZOOM Meetings and Field Outings

Due to the Covid-19 virus rules there will **no Indoor Lectures** or **Pub Meetings** until further notice.

Zoom Meetings

We held our AGM on Zoom and started 2021 with a superb Zoom talk from Dr Lucy Hawkes on the Bar-Headed Goose, and its adaptations to migrate over the Himalayas.

Zoom login details will be circulated by email in the week prior to the lecture. Login from 7.00 pm for a 7.15pm start as usual. You do not need to pre-register.

Wednesday 3 March 2021 - Much Ado About Mothing - a year intoxicated by Britain's rare and remarkable moths, by James Lowen. James is a naturalist based in Norfolk and is an accomplished and popular speaker, author and wildlife tour guide. <http://www.jameslowen.com/talks-brochure.html>

Wednesday 7 April 2021 - Amphibian Conservation, both locally and around the world, with a special focus on frogs and toads and urban pond/habitat creation. CiCi Blumstein, Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group Outreach and Social Media Officer. CiCi Blumstein is also an artist and frog collaborator, aka Agent Amphibian. <http://www.ciciblumstein.com>

Field Outings

In line with the 'Roadmap out of lockdown' announced by the government on February 22nd, the Society aims to restart Field Outings after March 29th operating under the 'Rule of six' and 'Staying local' guidance. Planning is underway, so watch out for emails of dates and booking deadlines.

It is anticipated that the Society's field outings will be run in the following manner:

- Field Outings to be a maximum of 6 attendees including the leader. Multiple dates will be offered, thus giving greater opportunity for members to attend.
- Pre-booking essential, with confirmation of members' up to date contact details.
- Participants must not have tested positive for Covid 19 in the last 14 days, be exhibiting any symptoms nor awaiting test results.
- Social distancing of 2 metres to be observed at all times.
- No sharing of binoculars or other equipment
- Members attend at their own risk.

For details and to book please email: Outdoor-events@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk

Medmerry Survey – 7th Year

We hope to be able to continue with our annual wildlife and botany surveys at Medmerry RSPB reserve this year. The proposed survey dates are detailed below, but any surveys will be subject to the COVID restrictions prevailing at the time. We have added a number of extra dates to cater for poor weather or repeat surveys if only small groups are allowed. Sessions are open to all, no matter what your level of expertise, as guidance will be provided. We shall use the Society's equipment, but hand magnifiers, binoculars and reference books will always be useful.

ALL surveys (approx. 2 hours in length) will start at 13:00 PROMPT, meeting at the RSPB Earnley Car Park at Grid Ref SZ 816 968, post code PO20 7JL, and then car sharing to the appropriate Survey Site. (Little walking required on any date.).

Any questions or if help required with transport then please contact Philippa Arnott on philippa.arnott@uwclub.net or phone 01243 575345.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Friday June 4 | DAFOR – survey of abundance of wild flowers |
| Friday June 11 | 2nd DAFOR or reserve day for bad weather |
| Friday June 18 | Quadrat survey of wild flowers |
| Friday June 25 | 2nd Quadrats or reserve day for bad weather |
| Friday July 2 | Early dragonflies |
| Friday July 9 | 2nd Early dragonflies or reserve day for bad weather |
| Friday August 6 | Grasshoppers and bush crickets |
| Friday August 13 | 2nd Grasshoppers and bush crickets or reserve day for bad weather |
| Friday September 3 | Late dragonflies |
| Friday September 10 | 2nd Late dragonflies or reserve day for bad weather, Celebration Tea |

CNHS Legacy Projects Report

2020 events posed limitations on what could be achieved to progress our legacy projects.

- School and Education; Chidham School have revamped their pond and have spent all the allocated funds.
- Chichester Observer Schools Nature Writing Competition – postponed
- Swift nesting boxes: no further boxes erected in 2020. Meanwhile you could support Swifts by using the RSPB smartphone app Swift Mapper, to log swift nesting sites. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/safeguarding-species/swiftmapper/>
- Camera trap – available for members to borrow, from John Kelsall (01243 788092). A number of members have used it this year.
- Laser tree range finder - available for members to borrow, from Helen Dignum. Used for tree surveys at West Dean Woods and Bishops Palace Gardens in 2020.
- Bat detectors: automated and handheld. These have been used extensively for significant bat studies, as detailed in the following reports.

ChiNats automatic bat detector at work in 2020, Linda and Ken Smith.

We are pleased that, despite everything, we have been able to gather lots more bat results this year.

In March when the weather turned warm enough for bats to be active, the country was in COVID-19 lockdown. So we deployed the automatic detector in our own garden in North Chichester almost every night. This has gathered vast quantities of data which we have not analysed yet (see below).

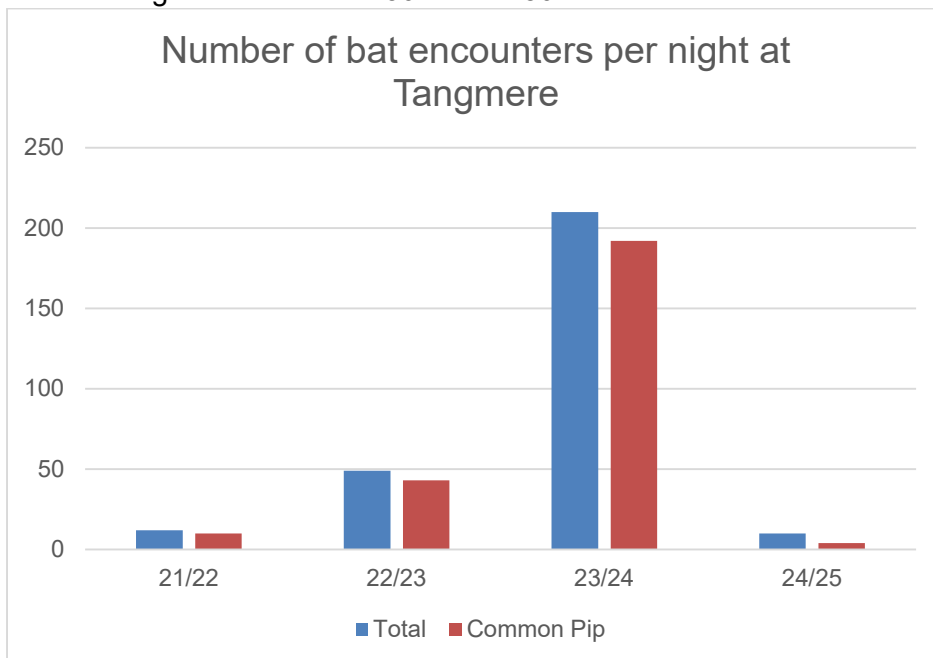
Once lockdown conditions eased, we loaned out the detector as normal in a COVID secure way. We primed the detector, members collected it and set it up in their own gardens for a few days and then returned it for analysis of the results. We recorded at ten new locations and seven repeat visits.

Three bat roosts were found. Large numbers of Soprano Pipistrelles were detected emerging from the roof of Ray McGlone's neighbour's house in the Summersdale area. See Ray's photo below. Thanks to Rodney and Maria Wilding, another large Soprano Pip roost was recorded at a farm building at Appuldram, with thousands of encounters over the three nights. A Common Pip roost was found by us in an old farmhouse at Chilgrove.

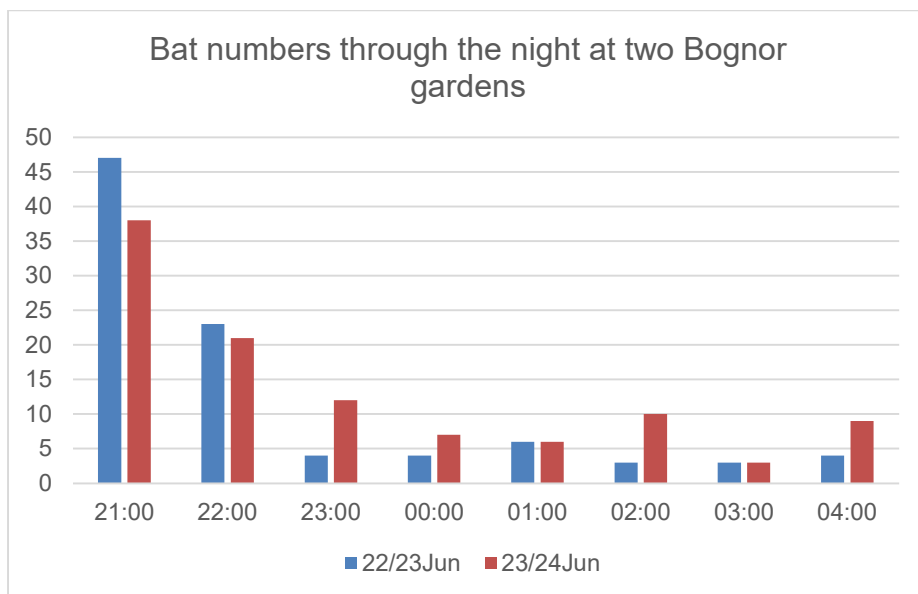
Jim Bagley investigated the impact of 'bat friendly' red streetlights installed in Hanger Drive, a new development on the old airfield at Tangmere, for four nights between 21-25 August. The analysis confirmed 249 recordings of calls of Common Pipistrelle bats. The chart shows the number of Common Pipistrelle calls through each night. Note, the number of calls does not equate to the number of bats, as an individual bat may fly near the detector many times, but there were clearly good numbers of bats visiting the garden throughout the night of 23/24th when the weather was warm with no rain. As well as the Common Pips, other less common species visited the garden.



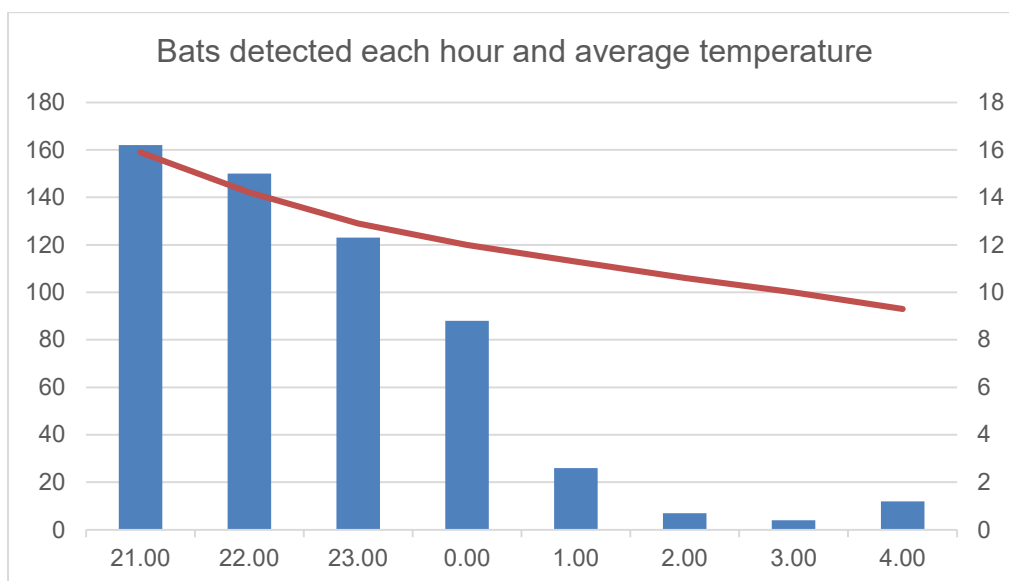
- The very similar Soprano Pipistrelle visited on two nights.
- One or more Noctule Bats were recorded each night at around 8:30-9:00 pm.
- On 23/24 there were records of a rare Barbastelle at 9:31pm, a Serotine at 11:46 and a Brown Long-eared bat at 11:30 and 12:50.



Julia and Bruce Macfarlane and their daughter, Heather, used the detector to compare the number of bats in their two Bognor gardens through the night. You can see in the chart below that most of the bats were seen between 9:00-11:00pm but a few were around all night. The numbers were similar, Julia and Bruce (blue bars) had a total of 94 and Heather (orange bars) had 106, mostly Common Pipistrelles (about 80%) with a few Soprano Pips and Serotines each night.



The bat detector also records the temperature through the night. This is nicely illustrated in the results from the Hamblin Centre in Bosham (thanks to Kim Fleming for organising). The number of bat encounters in each hour period through the night on left axis (blue bars); temperature, °C, on right axis (orange line).



In the autumn, the detector helped with a project for the pupils at Seaford College, where David and Heather Hart's son, Julian, is Deputy Head. He borrowed the detector and placed it at two different locations where they are planning to carry out habitat restoration in the grounds. We were able to give Julian the full 'raw' results in a series of spread sheets for the students to analyse the data themselves, apply the confidence limits on each recording and practice work on spreadsheets and making charts etc. There were 7333 recordings logged over the two nights, Noise 1170; Birds 146; Bats 3051 and Crickets 2965.

Our analysis showed they had nine different species of bat at the site. The most numerous were Soprano Pips but also included Barbastelle, Serotine, Nathusius' Pip, Common Pip, Brown Long-eared and possibly Daubenton's, Whiskered, Natterer's bats.

The recordings of crickets possibly included six species, calling all night, Speckled bush-cricket and Dark bush-cricket, and small numbers of possible registrations of Long-winged conehead, Grey bush cricket,

Roesel's bush-cricket and Great green bush cricket. There was also one call from a Wood Mouse. Julian Hart and the students plan to borrow the detector again, after they have completed the restoration work, to monitor any differences.

Christian and Gill Hance and David and Heather Hart have made good use of the mobile i-pad bat detector through the summer and autumn. We experimented turning the static detector into a mobile unit by carrying it in a rucksack with the microphone on a pole. It worked very well, see photo of Linda combining a Nightjar and bat survey at Chilgrove one evening in August.

We hope some of you saw the feature on acoustic recording for small mammals on BBC WinterWatch on 28th January. This extends the use of bat detectors to analyse mammal sounds. The sonograms we record are analysed using specialist software provided by BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) which identifies bat calls and assigns them to species with a score reflecting the confidence in the match. Confidence thresholds are then applied and records below the threshold are allocated to species groups or rejected. The results have not been verified by viewing the actual recordings of the calls. We have been working with Stuart Newson, who leads the work at the BTO to further develop the software.

On 20th January, the BTO launched a new project 'Acoustic Pipeline' which allows subscribers to upload the recordings from bat detectors onto the BTO website to be analysed by the latest software and the results sent back to the observers. We have signed up for this new service and hope it will help us analyse the tens of thousands on bat records we have gathered over the last three years.

The ChiNats bat detector will be available again this year. If you would like to use it in your garden or know of a location where collection of bat records would be valuable, please get in touch.

Linda and Ken Smith, Chichester. email: kenandlindasmith@gmail.com



ChiNATS Handheld Echo Recorder Bat Survey at Northwood, 2020

The Society is keen to encourage members to carry out their own wildlife surveys and report the results to us all. In these times when we are limited in how much we can mix, we can still share our observations and help build a valuable record of wildlife in our area.

This report gives details of a Bat survey which has been started by two members in the National Trust Slindon Estate. Maybe this will inspire other members to start their own surveys, or to present the results of surveys they have already carried out, or which are in progress.

The Society has been very fortunate to have money from bequests to invest in various pieces of equipment and projects. Acting on a suggestion from some of our members, two different bat detectors were purchased and both have proved very popular. The static detector has yielded impressive records from numerous gardens, as detailed in the previous article, and you are encouraged to make a booking if you have not yet used it - contact Linda Smith to make a booking.

It was using the smaller handheld Echo Meter Touch that Gill & Christian Hance started a survey of the National Trust Northwood over the summer 2020. Obviously, lock down prevented the project covering the entire season, however 3 surveys were conducted starting on July 16th and concluding in mid-September. On each visit the same 2-hour route around the wood was taken. This included a walk through some of the emerging woodland as well as the more mature areas. Each survey commenced around sunset. When a bat was detected the location was noted manually.

For the surveys in July & August the weather was warm with plenty of flying insects observed. In September the weather had turned noticeably cooler and fewer insects were observed.

In total 9 species were detected during the survey season, with between 6 & 7 different species present during each survey. Four of these species were detected during all surveys. These were:

- Common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrelles*)
- Common serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*)
- Barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*)
- Soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*)

Three further species were detected on two occasions each. These were:

- Lesser noctule (*Nyctalus leisleri*)
- Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*)
- Myotis species (possibly Whiskered, Daubenton's or Brandt's)

The remaining two species were only detected once. Therefore prudence must be exercised in assuming that they were actually present, rather than being a mistake by the automated recorder. These were:

- Grey long-eared bat (*Plecotus austriacus*)
- Brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*)

Given the scarcity of the Grey Long-eared Bat in the UK, considerable caution should be exercised in assuming it is present without other recordings to back up this one.

When looking at the locations where the bats were detected it was very noticeable that all species were much more common in areas with larger numbers of mature trees. In addition the presence of open water, as expected, increased the number of species detected.

There was no significant difference between the survey dates in terms of the bat species detected nor was there any significant change of species associated with the time of the survey.

Obviously this study is at a very early stage and will need more records in order to present any firm conclusions. Hopefully in 2021 the entire season can be surveyed.

2020 Phenology

Over the last 15 years we have built up an impressive Phenological record for the Chichester area. Recordings of when members first observe 12 indicator species help the Society to see how climate change is impacting our local wildlife.

This year only a few species appeared earlier than in 2019. However, the long term trend for the majority of species is still towards an earlier appearance, e.g. some species are now appearing, on average, over 26 days earlier than at the start of the study. Those species which are recorded as appearing later tend to be those that are becoming scarcer e.g. Cuckoo.

The reason for the later appearance in 2020 of some species is probably related to the temperature. The spring of 2020, whilst very sunny, had a lower mean temperature than 2019. For more detailed results, please see the presentation on the website -

<http://www.chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk/surveys>

FIELD OUTING REPORTS (see our website for field trip photos)

These field outings were run in groups of 6 on successive days for COVID compliance. The planned November Field Outings were cancelled by the second lockdown but run in December instead.

Nutbourne Marshes, October 2020

Monday 5th October – Team 1

On an unexpectedly warm and sunny morning, led by John Kelsall, Gill Hance, Stephanie and I set off towards the sea wall. As our intrepid band walked along the field edge towards the water, the hedge was alive with sparrows, and we also encountered a robin, a wren, a dunnock, and a surprising number of swallows. Out on the recently sown field to our left we saw pigeon and crow. Constant companions as we walked were pairs of magpies when looking landward. The tide was fairly low but coming in, and we saw a family of Swans, Canada geese, ducks too remote to identify but looking convincingly Mallardish, Herring gull, Curlew, Black headed gull, Egret, and a few Brent geese on the shoreline but many more in flight, accompanied by much honking. In the marshy area behind the sea wall we were treated to the explosive cry of Cetti's Warbler, repeated many times, and off in the distant trees, the distinctive laughter of the Green Woodpecker.

Moving on along the sea wall heading West we saw several more Egret, Oyster Catcher, and Curlew. On one of the deep-water channel markers a Cormorant perched, and we noticed some Black Tailed Godwits and a group of Oyster Catchers. At about the same time we spotted a Great Crested Grebe diving in the deepening waters of the rising tide

Heading inland and back to our starting point, we were impressed by the heavy fruiting of the Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Wild Rose and Spindle. Here we also encountered a pair of Darters (common or ruddy) in 'tandem'; polite terminology for what they were up to ((John is checking it out from his photographic evidence (Ruddy – black legs))! Several small white butterflies were still active around the field edges, and in the adjoining meadows a flock of Starlings foraged and whistled their distinctive song. We also saw a single Goldfinch, a small group of Long Tailed Tits and a similar number of Greenfinch. As John and I walked back to the parking area, Gill and Stephanie discovered and photographed a Comma Butterfly. Our walk would not have been complete without the sight and alarm call of a Blackbird, and as we prepared to leave a group of Buzzards; three or perhaps four high overhead completed our delightful walk in the morning sunshine. *Alan Carn.*

Tuesday 6th October - Team 2

A total of just five members were able to meet at Nutbourne Marsh car park on Tuesday 6th October. It was a pleasantly mild and sunny morning and so we all set off in great spirits. Before leaving the car park, we were seeing quite a few birds such as goldfinch, house sparrows, starling, buzzard, pigeons and crow, with a robin singing its heart out in the background. We set off in a westerly direction and immediately spotted a heron across the field, a pair of jays flying, jackdaws and magpies. There was a pause whilst we all focused on a bird perched high in a tree and a little in the distance - we finally all agreed it was a greenfinch!

A little further on, past the orchards on our left (we all admired the delicious looking apples) we came across a field of two contented looking Old English Longhorns. David decided to stop for 10 minutes and allow the birds to come to us, and slowly they did. Gradually blue and great tits began to show themselves as well as a green woodpecker searching for food under a huge oak tree, totally oblivious to the two rabbits enjoying the sunshine. Swallows and martins were seen above us and a ruddy darter and large white butterfly were also enjoying the unexpected warmth. Moving on towards the seashore we were soon treated to a Kestrel hovering, oystercatcher, redshank and curlew searching for food, swans and brent geese further out to sea. A great crested grebe diving energetically - always a joy to see. Looking across the green field behind us we were delighted to see a stonechat, a reed bunting and many more sparrows. Just before leaving the shoreline to head back to our cars, we had a great view of ringed plovers.

Finally as we walked past another reed bed on our left, we heard the Cetti's Warbler. A great walk, thanks to David, and very good company. *Heather Hart*

Wednesday 7th October - Team 3

Chi Nats members have been very lucky with the weather this week. Four more members met up promptly with Jim Bagley who had already noted House Sparrow, Crow, Wood Pigeon, Blackbird, Rook, Robin, Swallow, House Martin and Green Woodpecker! The Team were off to a great start with their bird list. Jim decided to take us 'anti clockwise' to catch the harbour side at a good state of tide, towards the end of our walk.

On passing by the old orchards and under the aged conifer trees, we had sightings of Blue Tit, Jay, Magpie, Chiffchaff and Wren. Emerging into the sunshine once more and making our way around the field edge, feral pigeons and Great Tit were added to the list. Members were keen to photograph and learn about Robin's Pincushion (*Diplolepis rosae*) or mossy rose gall caused by the larvae of a tiny gall wasp that feeds on wild roses.

As we sat, sheltered by the sea wall, Black-headed Gull (with a dark spot at this time of year I was informed, rather than a black head), a pair of Mute Swans and Little Egret were noted while a Kestrel performed a characteristic hover and fly past, right in front of us. We moved out to the breezier nearby point, entertained by a flock of Starling over the brambles, a Sky Lark overhead and a brief view of Goldfinch as well as many more Sparrow dashing about in those brambles. Moving east, with the wind at our backs, we saw Curlew, Oyster Catcher, Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel and Redshank. Excellent views were seen and photos taken of a female Wheatear on the rocks and a group of male and female Stonechat in the field to our left, balancing on the red dock (*Rumex*) stems.

We all enjoyed watching a Great Crested Grebe going in and out of sight as it dived and a large Herring Gull as it rose to move away from a group of Black-headed Gulls. Cetti's Warbler were distinctly heard from the reeds beyond the sea wall and finally, Pheasant and Buzzard concluded our bird list, making 36 bird species in total. In addition, throughout the walk, members saw beautiful and plentiful amounts of rose hips and hawthorn berries as well as spindle fruit, sloe and also a late-flying male emperor dragonfly.

As a finale, Jim had 'laid on' a display of two Spitfires and a Messerschmitt. A dramatic ending to a most enjoyable morning. Many thanks to Jim and to fellow attendees.

Gill Hance

Cobnor Point, December 2020

Monday 7/12/20 – Walk 1

Six of us met at Chidham Car Park and walked eastward towards the estuary to look over Bosham, then southwards towards Cobnor Point. It was a frosty grey dull morning but with a few streaks of weak sunlight. No wind. The first thing we saw was a friendly robin on the car park information board, no doubt looking for a handout. Then a group of a dozen Brent geese with attendant first year juveniles. We were puzzled by three of the birds which had white/grey blotchy sides. Not juveniles nor pale bellied, so unsure.

At the coast we turned left/north to see a flock of 25/30 fieldfares. Winter visitors, so be warned, it's coming. Retracing our steps, we turned south and on the way to the sailing club we saw wren, mute swans, rooks, cormorant, red breasted mergansers, oystercatcher, grey plover, curlew, and redshank. Arriving at the sailing club we found blackbird, dunnoek, chaffinch, wood pigeon, blue and great tits, greenfinch, magpie and much to our delight three goldcrests flitted incessantly through an old oak.

Leaving the club, we saw goldfinch and a song thrush. Out onto the point we saw a good dozen more red breasted mergansers, teal, turnstones, black headed gulls, moorhen, little egrets, a great black backed gull flew over, and a grey heron. But no seals. Turning for home and dreaming of hot soup we saw 30/40 starlings which were sharing a tree with a solitary redwing which flew off to join 3 passing fieldfares, giving us a clear view of the size difference between the two species. Finally, we managed to see and finally identify (thanks to Judy) several early flowering spikes of winter heliotrope. *Tony Wootton*

Tuesday 8 December 2020 - Walk 2

On a beautiful clear, cold, sunny morning a Rule of 6 group met at the "sunken" car park in Chidham for a walk to Cobnor Point with John Arnott. Before we had left the car park we had seen a small flock of Fieldfares flying across. The tide was low, coming in so there was exposed mud and the birds were easily seen on it. Curlew, Grey plover, Redshank, Oystercatcher and Black-tailed Godwit were noted along with a Little egret, Heron, about 40 Teal and a couple of Wigeon. There was also, surprisingly, a lone Knot on the mud of the lagoon looking very smart in the sunshine. A little group of Turnstone were scurrying about the weed on the water's edge and from the Point some Bar-tailed godwit were spotted along with a couple of Shelduck. John spotted a Great Northern diver, which kept diving, but everyone got a good look at it. A

pair of Red-breasted mergansers were also out on the water. A small flock of Dunlin were running along the shoreline. On the way back John found some Lapwing on their high-tide roost and the last birds to be seen were a Redwing with the Fieldfares in the trees on the edge of the car park – and a Kestrel flew in to another tree. Sadly these last two were not seen by 4 of the group as they had already left.

John was surprised to find a Privet which had many berries but also some new blossom just coming out. He also talked about marble galls which had been commented on by the group.

A total of 37 birds were seen which included the usual Robins, Wren, Blue tit, Magpie, Carrion crow, Dunnock, Goldfinch, Blackbird and 2 Song thrushes. A Dunnock was singing loudly from a hedge on the way back and a Roe deer was also spotted as were 3 rabbits in a field with Moorhens.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable morning spent in good company with lovely weather and lots of birds including some unexpected ones. It was really good to see people we had not seen for many months and being able to catch up with friends was a tonic. Thanks to John for leading a successful walk – and to Gill for organising it.
Philippa Arnott

Wednesday 9th December – Walk 3

On a chilly, grey and very still afternoon, five members gathered with John Kelsall together with a suitably Christmassy Robin. (I wonder if this was the same robin as seen on a previous walk?) Heading towards the coast, we saw Blackbird, Brent Geese and also a Kingfisher dashing into a nearby field. We noted privet, bearing both flowers and berries. Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit and Oystercatcher were seen at the water's edge and I was pleased to have pointed out to me a Black-headed Gull with its characteristic black spot behind the eye and no black head! Next were Mallard, a diving Cormorant, Grey Plover and the first of several Redshank to be observed.

Close to the sailing club, a bank of Winter Heliotrope was beginning to flower. Passing by a splendid mixed hedge with its plentiful sloes and hips, we enjoyed Chiffchaff, Wren and Chaffinch. A flock of Starling gathered in a distant tree. By Cobnor House, one keen eyed member spotted a Kestrel perched at the very top of a tall tree while others were noting three plump Woodpigeon in a waterside oak. Berried Butchers Broom (*Ruscus*) and stinking iris (*Iris foetidissima*) were used to test a member's plant identification App (amazing technology!) Over a field gate we saw Magpie and caught sight of a Green woodpecker.

By the water's edge again, on the wheelchair accessible path, Little Egret, Shelduck and Grey Plover were seen, and a noisy Chinook helicopter brought up flocks of Starling and Lapwing. A great Black-backed Gull flew past and settled on a marker post in the channel. As part of the tidal managed retreat area was a pool with a gathering of Teal and a Heron which took flight at our approach.

Out on the water, near Cobnor Point, we saw a pair of Merganser and Cormorant but no seals. It was getting dark so, having admired the watery looking sunset, the group turned back the way it had come. To our list of birds were added Blue Tit, Mediterranean Gull and Jackdaw while Bristly Oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*) and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera*) were added to the remarkably long list of plants which were in flower.

Many thanks to John Kelsall and to fellow members who made for such an enjoyable and interesting walk.
Gill Hance

Book Review: David Attenborough “A Life on our Planet”

Don't be misled: David Attenborough's latest book “A Life on Our Planet – My Witness Statement and a Vision for the Future” sounds formal, equanimous. At heart it's nothing less than an eloquent scream beseeching us to wake up and respond urgently to his inescapable conclusion: “Our future on the planet, the only place as far as we know where life of any kind exists, is at stake.”

Definitively he sets out the blunders, omissions and dangerous over-confidence paving our global route to the current tipping point. Then, against this daunting mountain, he sets out a strategy to avert long-term planet destruction – rewilding land and sea, switching to clean energy, taking human population into sharper focus with the aim of achieving more balanced lives. Yes, for many of us that entails some unwelcome lifestyle adjustments. Surely, though, a small price for survival? Likewise, £20 is a snip for this environmental gospel. *Terry Timblick*

FROM THE EDITOR

As I write at the end of February, there is a glimmer of hope that restrictions will be lifted in the coming months, particularly outdoor activities so I hope we can all meet on field trips and Medmerry surveys before too long. Before then there is plenty of online wildlife content and training webinars from Sussex Wildlife Trust, Plantlife, Field Studies Council.

Thanks for our reporters for their contributions to the Newsletter. We always welcome articles on any natural history subject for the newsletter so if you have something please send it to me for publication. It does not have to be about an exotic location – it could just be a wildlife event in your garden. All reports and articles should be sent to Helen Dignum at helendignum@protonmail.com
Deadline for articles for Newsletter 200 is 21 May 2021

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