



Brown Hare. Photo D Cotter.

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An amazingly warm and dry February has encouraged us to believe that Spring is already with us, **Coltsfoot** and **Pussy Willows** flowering, **Primroses** and **Violets** in profusion, and birds singing. However, as I write the weather is much cooler, and the March wind is making itself felt. We may well have more wintry weather to come, so don't get too excited yet!

At our AGM your standing committee and officers were re-elected *en bloc*, and happily we elected three new members to the committee. They are John Rodgers, our Botany Recorder, and two newer members, Linda Clark and Jayne Walker, and we look forward to working with them over the coming year, our first task being to plan our programme for 2020. It seems a long way ahead, but following another successful calendar publication in 2018 we plan to repeat it in 2019, and therefore need an outline 2020 programme by September. Look out for entry details for the photographic competition on page 2 of *Fieldfare*, and keep taking the pictures!

Hendrina Ellis has decided to step down as *Fieldfare* Editor in May, after 12 years, and we thank her for her superb work, raising the standard of our newsletter tremendously over this period, reliably presenting a lovely document every two months. Richard and Linda Brown have agreed to take on the editing of *Fieldfare*, and to start preparation for publication. The Browns do not feel able to do this six times a year, so at the AGM the membership also approved an outline proposal to reduce the number of editions of *Fieldfare* to four per year. As a trial we shall have the August edition professionally 'set', i.e. prepared for printing.

The AGM was followed by an excellent presentation by Philip Parker of King's

Dyke Nature Reserve between Whittlesey and Stanground, providing a great background to our visit there on July 13. It is an area of old quarry and brickworks, which has become an impressive and quite large reserve, with among many other species Bittern and Great Crested Newts, but as seems all too familiar, it is being encroached upon from all sides by development.

More locally, in addition to the now approved St George's Barracks development at North Luffenham, the Quarry Farm Stamford proposals are for 650 houses in the short term, and up to 2000 over the next few years. I have also received information that Bidwell's Quarry is proposing to reopen Clipsham Quarry, and are applying for an environmental permit to process up to 100,000 tons of stone there per year. They apparently don't need any SSSI approval since the work is outside the designated area of the adjacent SSSIs, even though the work will obviously have an impact on the environment.

Linda Biddle, RNHS Chair

Rutland Natural History Society 2020 Calendar

This will be our THIRD RNHS wildlife calendar. We are asking you to send in a wide selection of photographs – see rules below – from which we can choose the best ones for the 2020 calendar AND also to form part of the Members' and Recorders' meeting – an early Christmas party – on November 4.

Rules are:

- 1 Three entries per participant, with a short description and/or caption for each, including date and place. Recent photos preferred (2018 and 2019).
- 2 High resolution photos so as to support quality printing in the calendar. (Only landscape photos for the calendar. Portrait *and* landscape for the meeting.)
- 3 Content to be general views of Rutland, or wildlife photos ideally taken in Rutland. However if wildlife has been photographed outside Rutland but is in fact found in Rutland, that will be acceptable. (A photo of a bird in breeding plumage which in fact is only a winter visitor to Rutland would not be ok.)
- 4 **DEADLINE August 31!**

Please send your photographs to me at peter.scott27@btopenworld.com, or if you would like to discuss this further, call me on my mobile 07535 508932.

We hope this year that more members will participate in order to cover the widest range of topics as possible – we always have plenty of bird and butterfly photographs but not enough caterpillars, moths, amphibians, wild flowers, trees

Please remember to be sympathetic to the subject matter and do not disturb nest sites, roost sites, etc.

Peter Scott, Website Editor

A new book for Rutland

Our Vice President and Orthoptera Recorder Phil Rudkin (irrepressible – see page 12!), is compiling *The Grasshoppers and Crickets of Rutland*, see page 11. Phil has been Orthoptera Recorder for so many years back that I can't find his first *Fieldfare* Report, and has amassed with his teams of RNHS members huge amounts of data on the Orthoptera of Rutland. Congratulations, Phil!



DIARY DATES

RNHS FIELD TRIPS

Full details of all these events appear on our website at www.rnhs.org.uk. If the weather is bad, check the website or call the 'Queries' phone number for changes.

Sunday 24 March, 10 am

Eyebrook Reservoir

Leader Peter Scott, RNHS Website Editor. A new way to look at this reservoir! The Leicestershire Eyebrook Fishery is signposted off the A6003 at Caldecott, just off the Great Easton Road. Then follow a one-mile concrete track to the Fishing Lodge and meet to register there (Map ref: SP856941. Postcode: LE15 8RP). Most of this walk will be on good paths/concrete tracks but please wear sensible shoes and clothing appropriate to this time of year.

Queries: Peter Scott, 07535 508932, peter.scott27@btopenworld.com

Saturday 13 April, 10 am

Spring at Pickworth Great Wood

Leader Linda Biddle, RNHS Chairman and Mammal Recorder. This is a large deciduous woodland SSSI on the boundary of Rutland and Lincolnshire. Park just opposite Quarry Farm (OS grid ref SK987156) and walk up the track to the wood.

Queries: Linda Biddle, 01780 762108; abiddle21@talktalk.net

Sunday 5 May, 3.45 am

Dawn chorus at Pickworth Great Wood

Leader Linda Biddle, RNHS Chairman and Mammal Recorder. Enjoy this wood at dawn! See above for parking. Warm clothing, suitable footwear and a torch essential. We recommend bringing a picnic chair, a hot drink and breakfast!

Queries: Linda Biddle, 01780 762108; abiddle21@talktalk.net

Saturday 11 May, 10 am

Glaphorn Cow Pastures

Leader Peter Scott. Overgrown historic cow pasture (SSSI), two specials are nightingales and Black Hairstreak butterflies. Park down lane opposite entrance to wood (Map ref: SK005902. Postcode: PE8 5BH).

Queries: Peter Scott, 07535 508932, peter.scott27@btopenworld.com

Friday 7 June, 2 pm

Survey at Seaton Meadows

Leaders Joe Costley of Plantlife and Jenny Harris, RNHS Bat Recorder, for this annual survey (SK914979). Limited car parking, please contact Jenny Harris to book a space giving a contact phone number.

Queries: Jenny Harris, 01572 755274, jennyharris221@gmail.com

Tuesday 18 June, 11 am

Grantham Canal

Leaders Claire Install, LRWT Conservation Officer, and Linda Biddle. Meet at Dove cottage tea rooms (Canal Lane, Stathern). (Map ref: SK755324, postcode LE14 4EX). Walk, and lunch available at the tearoom.

Queries: Linda Biddle, 01780 762108; abiddle21@talktalk.net

Sunday 23 June, 10 am

Holwell Nature Reserves

Leader John Bristow, LRWT Conservation Officer and RNHS Committee. Old quarries and grassland, north of Melton Mowbray. Meet at SK74157 23575 by the grass triangle.

Queries: John Bristow, 07975660656, jbristow@lrwt.org.uk

RNHS EVENING MEETINGS

Indoor meetings are held at Rutland Community Hub (VAR), Lands End Way, Oakham LE15 6RB. Tea and coffee, free. Visitors are asked for a donation of £2.

Tuesday 2 April, 7.30 pm

Ospreys: the latest news and information

By Dr Tim Mackrill who managed the Rutland Osprey Project for more than ten years, having first got involved as a volunteer when he was 15 years old. His latest project is the Osprey Leadership Foundation.

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND WILDLIFE TRUST, RUTLAND GROUP

For events in Leicestershire and Rutland see www.lrwt.org.uk or phone 0116 262 9968. Rutland group meetings are held at the Volunteer Training Centre (VTC), Hambleton Road, LE15 8AD. Entry £1.

LINCOLNSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST, BOURNE GROUP

For details of all LWT events, see www.lincstrust.org.uk, or phone 01507 526677 in office hours. Bourne group indoor meetings are held at the Methodist Church Hall, Bourne. You don't need to be a member to join in our activities.

Sunday 14 April, 10.30 – 16.00

Dole Wood open day

Come along to our open day at Dole Wood and explore this woodland reserve and its carpet of bluebells. Volunteers will be present to talk to you about the Trust and the conservation work at the wood. There will also be a sales stall plus refreshments, excellent home-made cooking and locally grown plants for sale. Map ref: TF 0917 1615. Roadside parking along Obthorpe Lane.

Saturday 18 May 14.00 – 16.00

Tortoiseshell Wood

Come along and join us for a pleasant guided walk around Tortoiseshell Woods, a Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve known for its rich and varied ground flora. Map ref: SK 963 197. Meet at the entrance to the wood.

WEATHER

RECORDER Roy Lemmon

*87 Empingham Road, Stamford PE9 2SU. Telephone 01780 762051
E-mail: roy.lemmon@yahoo.co.uk*

January 2019

Atmospheric pressure and wind In the first half of the month pressures were high, at 09.00 on the 3rd I registered 1043 mb, which is the highest I have recorded since June 1995. On the 16th the pressure fell to 1004.5 mb and stayed low to the end of the month, the lowest being 991.5 mb on the 27th. On all of the last 6 days of the month they were very low and this was also a period of low temperatures. Winds were predominantly NW-N.

Temperature This was a cold January, the overall mean, 4.05 °C, made it the 7th coldest in the decade 2010-2019. There were 12 air frosts and the lowest temperature recorded was -6.5 °C on the night of 29-30, followed by the second lowest, -5.0 °C, on the last night of the month. Daytime temperatures were also low during this period and the daytime maximum on the 31st was 2.4 °C.

Rain A dry January, the total recorded here was 20.9 mm (0.82 inches), the lowest in the above quoted decade. This equates to 43% of my long-term mean of 29 years. Daily amounts were generally small with the exception of the 26th when 9.5 mm (0.37 inches) fell.

February 2019

Atmospheric pressure and wind Pressures were low for the first 10 days of the month and there were two periods of high pressure, 11th-16th and 21st to the end.

The only named storm of the month, Erik, occurred on the 7th–9th and there were some high winds associated with it; at 9.00 on the 7th I recorded gusts up to 38 mph at ground level. The last 8 days of the month were typically anticyclonic with clear blue skies, low wind speeds and relatively high temperatures. Overall, winds were predominantly S–SW.

Temperature Nationally, this month is likely to be the warmest February ever, but we shall not know till mid-March as the Met. Office has to collect and evaluate the data (this is written on March 1). What is certain is that the previous daytime maximum, 19.7 °C dating back to 1995, was exceeded on the 25th when 20.6 °C was recorded at Trawsgoed, West Wales; and then again on the 26th with 21.2 C at Kew Gardens.

Locally, my highest February maximum was 17.3 °C, on the 23rd in 2012. This was superseded on the 26th when I recorded 18.2 °C. The overall mean here was 6.92 °C, the highest in the decade 2010–2019, with 2011 second at 6.6 °C. This came about because although the mean minimum was only fourth in the decade, the mean maximum, 11.83 °C, was well in the lead of the second which was 2014 at 9.53 °C. There were 7 air frosts, the lowest being –2.3 °C on the 2nd/3rd.

Rain Another dry month, a total here of 26.8 mm (1.06 inches), 74% of my long-term mean, and of this 96% fell between the 3rd and 10th.

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES **RECORDER Dr C H Gallimore**

*The Stone House, Reeves Lane, Wing LE15 8SD. Telephone: 01572 737343
E-mail: chasgall@hotmail.com*

January/February 2019

The mainly mild start to the year has resulted in more herpetological activity in these two months than is usual.

Frog spawn was first reported on 22nd February in Linda Worrall's pond in Barrowden, which is fairly usual. Frogs were also present in a pond in Wing at this time, but no spawn has yet been reported.

The first **Great Crested Newt** sighting of the year was a female in my garden pond in Wing on 15th January, which was not totally surprising as there was a male in the pond on 30th December 2018. The first male of 2019 was seen on 26th January in my cellar and a male and female were seen together in the pond on 7th February. The maximum number was 7 males and 2 females on 19th February. Unfortunately a pair of Mallards arrived at the end of February, successfully opacifying the water impeding further meaningful counts.

Smooth Newts were first seen on 7th February, increasing to 14 males and 4 females on 18th February.

The most surprising record for this period however was of a large active and healthy looking **Grass Snake** seen and photographed in Teigh by Andrew Moyce – by far the earliest record of a (live) Grass Snake recorded in Rutland .

My thanks for their records to: A Hill, Dr A C M Moyce and L Worrall.



Photo, D Cotter

BIRDS

RECORDER Terry Mitcham

30 Sutherland Way, Stamford PE9 2TB. Telephone: 01780 751268

E-mail: joterpat@btinternet.com

January/February 2019

At Rutland Water the year began – as 2018 had ended – still with scarce grebes, **Shags** and **Great Northern Divers** on view, as well as good numbers of wildfowl including the **American Wigeon** and several **Smew**. A **Glossy Ibis** was reported over Barrowden and a **Jack Snipe** showed well at Egleton. Raptors included **Marsh Harrier**, **Merlin** and **Peregrine** with a displaying **Sparrowhawk** by the end of February. The cold snap brought interesting species to some gardens but the recent balmy weather has encouraged song and nest-building by **Blackbirds**, tits and finches.

My thanks to the following for their records: D & J Ball, A & L Biddle, M Body, T Caldicott, A & J Comber, M & G Griffin, P Langston, LROS, D Masters, I Misselbrook, T Mitcham, B Moore, D Needham, J & M Nourish, L Park, J S & J Rodgers, P Rudkin, RWRN, L Worrall

See also *Wildfowl Counts*, page 9.

Pink-footed Goose	On 01.01 and 02.01, two were at EBR. Two were at RWLynd on the second date with one in RWNA on 06.01 and one near the Sailing Club on 15.02.
Greylag Goose	There were 346 by Rygate Lake in Ext Park on 27.01 and 343 at FHP on 10.02.
Brent Goose	One was at RWDam on 02.01.
Shelduck	Regular at FHP in both months with three on 10.02.
Mandarin Duck	Two were along the R Chater near Wg between 01 and 12.01. A pair were at RWNorm on 20.02.
American Wigeon	The RW male was present at Lynd to 11.01 and then noted there on 22.01, with further sightings in NA next day and on Eg5 on 28.01.
Teal	20 were on a lake at KQ on 21.01.
Red-crested Pochard	Numbers at RW declined sharply in January, with 51 on 01, 63 on 06 but just three on 25.
Scaup	All records were from RW, mainly in SA3, with a max of eight on 03.01, and birds noted to at least 26.02.
Smew	Present at EBR to at least 13.02, with a peak of 16 on 17 and 22.01. Noted at RW throughout both months with 12 on Eg4 on 27.02.
Goosander	Present on Rygate Lake in Ext Park on four dates between 05.01 and 11.02, with six on 18.01.
Grey Partridge	Four were at Lynd Top on 21.01, two were on stubble in Ext Park on 26.01 and two were by Eg4 on 29.01. One or two called near the Rutland Garden Nursery near Man on 12.02.
Great Northern Diver	Two were in RWSA to 17.01 with a single reported to 17.02.
Red-necked Grebe	Up to two were in RWSA3 from 01.01 to at least 24.02, mainly near the Old Hall.
Slavonian Grebe	Two were in RWNA to 06.01, with three then present to the end of Feb.
Black-necked Grebe	Two were in RWNA to at least 26.02.
Glossy Ibis	One was reported flying over Bden on 01.01.
Bittern	One was at RWEg3 on 04.01.
Great White Egret	One was at Banthorpe GP on 08.01, and up to five were at RWEg throughout both months. See photo on page 16.
Little Egret	Three were at Banthorpe GP on 08.01, one flew over Sutherland Way, Stam, on 22.01 and singles were at FHP on 10 and 15.02, with two on 24.02.
Grey Heron	One visited an Oak garden on 05.02.
Shag	Two were at RWDam on 01.01 and 06.01, with one remaining to 10.01.
Sparrowhawk	Noted near Pick and in two gardens at Oak (Greenfinch prey) and Barrow, with display over Ext Park on 11.02.
Marsh Harrier	Two were at RWEg to 20.01 and one was at EBR on 03.02.

Water Rail	One fed on a bird table at RWEg3 on 13.01.
Oystercatcher	At RW there were two on 20.01, increasing to 20 on 17.02.
Avocet	Two were at RW on 15.02, reported in NA and near the Sailing Club.
Golden Plover	Three flew over Ext Park on 29.01 and 30 were at EBR on 17.02.
Lapwing	There were high counts at the reservoirs with 1790 at EBR on 20.01, and 1780 there on 17.02. RW had 2003 on 20.01, and 994 on 17.02.
Curlew	One was at RW on 20.01 and two flew over Barrow on 28.02.
Ruff	Two were at RW on 06 and 20.01.
Dunlin	68 were at EBR on 08.01. Noted at RW from at least 19.01 to 17.02, with a max of 46 on 20.01.
Green Sandpiper	One was by the R Chater near Wg on 01.01, with one at RW on 20.01, two on 17.02, and one on 26.02.
Redshank	RW had 18 on 20.01 and seven on 17.02.
Woodcock	Present throughout both months with one or two at RWBerrybutts, PGW, Wg, Greet GC, Barns, Pilt and TunnW, where seven were flushed on 11.02.
Jack Snipe	One remained at RWEg to 25.01, occasionally showing well, with two reported on 28.01.
Snipe	Regular in low numbers at RW Sailing Club in both months, with five on 03.01. At FH there was one on 12.01 and two on 18.01. Six were at RW on 20.01 and 13 on 17.02.
Mediterranean Gull	Singles were at EBR in Jan on 02, 12, and 26. RW had one on 06.01, 23.01 and 24.02.
Iceland Gull	A second-winter roosted at EBR on 11.01.
Barn Owl	One or two were regular at RWEg/Lynd/SA, with one near Wg in Jan and on 01.02.
Tawny Owl	Calling birds were heard in Feb at CPW and TunnW.
Little Owl	Two called near Wg on 05, 26.01, and 01.02, with birds heard regularly at Barrow throughout both months. One was at Lynd Top between 15 and 28.02, with one near Pilt on 23.02.
Kingfisher	One was on the R Welland near Tin Pumping Station on 11.01.
Green Woodpecker	One was a regular visitor to a suburban Stam lawn in both months. Also noted at FHP, QF, GHW, Ext Park woods and RWEg.
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Drumming was heard from 03.01 (Emp) and at RW and PGW. Feeders were visited at TunnW, Barrow and Oak with other records from CPW and QF.
Merlin	One was near Martinthorpe on 24.01.
Kestrel	Reported from FHP, Ext Park and QF.
Peregrine	Singles flew over Barrow on 15.01, FHP on 10.02, Martinthorpe on 13.02 and RWSA on 22.02.
Jay	Noted in Ext Park woods in both months and near Pick on 16.02.
Raven	Seen/heard at three likely breeding sites in Jan, and regularly noted over Barrow with six on 12.02.
Willow Tit	A single noted near Wg on 01 and 05.01.
Marsh Tit	Regular at TunnW feeders in both months with one in an Oak garden on 05–06.02. Three were at Greet GC on 20.01 and two in PGW on 05.02.
Skylark	Song was noted at Pick from 16.02 and QF on 17.02.
Cetti's Warbler	Song was heard at RWEg on 29.01.
Long-tailed Tit	Two or three were in an Oak garden throughout Jan and to 26.02.
Chiffchaff	On 11.01 two were at Geest STW and five were ringed at RWeg. Song was heard at RWEg on 25 and 27.02.
Blackcap	Three Oak gardens attracted single birds in Jan and on 04.02 and 26.02. One of the Oak gardens had a male and a female on different dates.
Fieldfare	c. 400 were near Man on 12.01, with up to 20 at three other sites and 40 at FHP on 31.01. There were 320 near Martinthorpe on 13.02.

Song Thrush	Singing males noticeable at CPW, QF, FHP, TunnW, mainly in Feb.
Redwing	Just odd birds noted with Fieldfare flocks, and none reported after 27.01 at FHP and the next day at Barrow.
Mistle Thrush	One at Barrow on 12.02 was apparently unusual there.
Stonechat	RW had regular pairs near the Sailing Club in Jan and at EG Visitor Centre in both months. There was a pair at EBR on 06.01, with one on 08.01. A female was at FHP on 18.01 and a passage female along RWSA on 21.02.
Tree Sparrow	Up to five were at Hall Farm, Ext, feeders between 05.01 and 24.02. Six were near Man on 20.01.
Grey Wagtail	Singles were noted between 11.01 and 24.02 at FHP and Geest STW. One was in an Oak garden on 21.02.
Pied Wagtail	28 were on the filter beds at Geest STW on 01.02.
Meadow Pipit	c.40 were at RW Sailing Club bay on 11.01 and 21 were nearby at Norm on 28.02.
Rock Pipit	One called as it flew over RW Sailing Club on 09.01.
Chaffinch	50 were at Greet GC on 20.01. Full song was heard at CPW on 16.02.
Brambling	In Jan and on 10.02 odd birds were near Wg, WestlandW, RWNorm and in an Oak garden. Seven flew west at RWSA on 25.01. Seven were near Pilt on 03.02, with one or two over Leigh and RWSA on 25-26.02.
Greenfinch	Single figure counts came from four Oak and Stam gardens. Five were in song at QF on 17.02.
Linnet	Flocks of c.50 were in Ext Park on 12.01 and at RW Sailing Club bay on 25.01. One in an Oak garden on 06.02 was a less usual record.
Siskin	Very few were reported. Three were at WestlandW on 12.01 and three were at RWEg2 on 20.01. Up to three (are these all the same birds!) visited an Oak garden on several dates between 09.01 and 22.02, and one was in another Oak garden on 31.01.
Bullfinch	Reports of one or two came from Kett, RWEg and CPW.
Snow Bunting	One of the Dec 2018 birds just made it into this year and was at the dam to 02.01. It was seen to have a damaged wing and to be limping – RIP?
Yellowhammer	c.25 were in game crops along the edge of WestlandW on 31.01.
Reed Bunting	Singles were in gardens at Stam (24.01) and Oak (05.02) and 28 were in scrub at Banthorpe GP on 18.01.



Wildfowl counts for January and February 2019

	Rutland Water		Eyebrook Reservoir		Fort Henry ponds /Exton Park Lake		Holywell Lake		Banthorpe Gravel Pit	
	20.01	17.02	20.01	17.02	18.01	15.02	19.01	16.02	18.01	15.02
Mute Swan	238	283	94	107	10	10		2	2	3
Pink-footed Goose	3									
Greylag Goose	154	436	46	145	133	25	4	27		4
Canada Goose	710	354		52		1	34	34		
Egyptian Goose	28	25			5					
Shelduck	19	27			1	3				
Mandarin Duck										
Wigeon	3707	2772	626	650	184	198	81	48		
Gadwall	692	584	19	119	84	64	48	24		
Teal	1367	397	339	292	13	37	6	31	47	50
Mallard	867	400	181	104	247	164	138	83	1	56
Pintail	51	30	3							
Shoveler	98	47	4	13	8	1	1	1		
Red-crested Pochard	8									
Pochard	106	50	5	53	1					
Tufted Duck	1755	1594	414	120	62	64	32	6		3
Scaup	3	1								
Goldeneye	286	371	75	33						
Smew	6	12	5							
Goosander	26	24		1	6					
Great Northern Diver	2									
Shag	1									
Cormorant	295	270	54	31	5	1				
Great White Egret	4	5								
Little Egret	5	7	3			1	2	4	1	
Grey Heron	10	12	2	1	1				1	
Little Grebe	186	164	1		10	5	12	8		
Red-necked Grebe		1								
Great Crested Grebe	400	160	69							
Slavonian Grebe	3	3								
Black-necked Grebe	2	2								
Water Rail	10	1								
Moorhen	97	78		2	25	8	21	16		2
Coot	2573	921		82	96	82	1	3		
TOTAL	13712	9031	1940	1818	891	670	380	287	52	118

BOTANY

RECORDER John Rodgers

8 Summerfield, Oakham LE15 6PZ. Telephone: 01572 757278

E-mail: rnhsbotanyrecord@gmail.com

January/February 2019

Despite the very varied weather, including the record warm days in February, there hasn't been much change in recorded species since the last *Fieldfare*. There are one or two exceptions. **Snowdrops** were first reported by Terry Mitcham on the 17th January, seen at Tunnely Wood in Exton Park. They were accompanied by **Winter Aconites**. Dave Needham found a bank covered with the latter at Ketton Quarry a week or two later. **Coltsfoot** appeared there by the 19th of February and at Ryhall Heath on the 21st. Phil Rudkin found a large number of Coltsfoot flowers at Quarry Farm on the 17th; flowers only, because they appear before the leaf. The scientific name, *Tussilago*, relates to the plant's use for coughs. The leaf could be made into a concoction as a cough medicine but there is also a reference to the dried leaves being smoked to relieve cough, which sounds like curing one ailment but starting up another.

Only one record has been sent in for **Lesser Celandine**, by Martin Grimes, found at Tinwell churchyard and this was for just one flower. It seems a bit later than usual. I've seen numerous specimens this last weekend in the Bristol area.

The most forward plant recorded was by Roy Lemmon in Prior's Coppice. This was **Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage** on the 14th of February. In Roy's experience this is a good month before it is usually found.

Let's hope that the Spring settles down, in more ways than one, and there's lots of opportunity to enjoy Nature and then send in some records.

Many thanks to our faithful recorders, mentioned above.

BUTTERFLIES

RECORDER Richard Brown

10 Victoria Road, Stamford PE9 1HR. Telephone: 01780 590707

E-mail: ribrow@hotmail.co.uk

January/February 2019

Given the mild weather, you will not be surprised that 2019 is proving an 'early year' for our butterflies. By the end of February, 5 species have been seen on the wing in Rutland. The table shows that the first recorded dates are similar to those of 2017, and nearly a month ahead of the 2016 and 2018 first records. Also striking this year are the numbers and spread of the observations – **Brimstone** from 11 sites, **Small Tortoiseshell** from 9, **Peacock** and **Comma** 4 each and **Red Admiral** 2. The early Red Admirals probably represent the increasing tendency of this species to overwinter in the UK, rather than appearing later in the year as incoming migrants.

RNHS earliest recorded dates for years 2016 to 2019

2016	2017	2018	2019
Small Tort 20 Mar	Small Tort 03 Feb	Brimstone 16 Mar	Peacock 13 Feb
Brimstone 20 Mar	Brimstone 03 Feb	Comma 16 Mar	Small Tort 14 Feb
Comma 31 Mar	Red Admiral 04 Feb	Small Tort 16 Mar	Brimstone 20 Feb
Orange Tip 10 Apr	Peacock 07 Feb	Peacock 21 Mar	Comma 23 Feb
Peacock 10 Apr	Comma 09 Mar	Large White 19 Apr	Red Admiral 24 Feb

Will we get a crash?

Rather counter-intuitively, the long hot summer of 1976 was followed by a major fall in butterfly and moth numbers in 1977. After the drought of the 2018 summer, what is going to happen this year?

Chequered Skipper

There is no news yet whether any of last year's reintroductions have laid eggs that have survived the winter, to give us our first locally bred adults since 1976. Watch this space!

Thanks to D & J Ball, C Baxter, T Caldicott, M Grimes, D Masters, T Mitcham, D Needham, P Rudkin, P Scott and L Worrall for submitting their observations.

MOTHS

RECORDER Paul Bennett

90 Kesteven Rd, Stamford PE9 1SR. Telephone: 01780 754569
E-mail: p.bennett569@btinternet.com

No records for January or February, but please continue sending in your records.

PLANT GALLS

RECORDER Roy Lemmon

87 Empingham Road, Stamford PE9 2SU. Telephone: 01780 762051
E-mail: roy.lemmon@yahoo.co.uk

What is a gall?

At its simplest it is an abnormal growth on a plant, which is the result of an intimate contact between another organism, the *galler*, and the *host plant*. This contact, or it could be termed an attack, induces the host to produce extra tissue, the *gall*, which then serves as food and shelter, sometimes for the galler but more usually for its offspring.

A good example of this is the Marble gall on Oak, which usually presents as a brownish 'marble'. It was introduced into this country from the Eastern Mediterranean in the 1830s, as its high tannin content had extensive uses in tanning leather, dyeing cloth and the manufacture of ink. The galler here is a gall wasp and its young eventually eat their way out of the gall when mature; one can often see the exit holes especially in the Autumn.

Plant galls have been around for a very long time. The earliest known is a fossil on the leaf stalk of a tree fern, dated to some 302 millions years ago. It is well preserved and was probably caused by an insect, but the larva has left the gall and therefore its identity can't be discovered. It could have been a sawfly as similar galls are caused by them in fern petioles today. Galls were known to the Greeks and Romans as well as the Chinese, but were most probably those on Oak trees as they are quite obvious and, as indicated above, have commercial applications.

February 2019

Two galls were reported, both rusts, on the 16th at Bloody Oaks Quarry.

ORTHOPTERA

RECORDER Phil Rudkin

10 Brooke Avenue, Stamford, PE9 2RU. Telephone: 01780 762998
E-mail: phil.rudkin@talktalk.net

January/February 2019

I am working on my proposed book *The Grasshoppers and Crickets of Rutland*. This will be a County Orthoptera publication, which the National Orthoptera Recording Scheme organisers asked me to do two years ago. However, I wanted to get the Distribution Maps completed, up to 2017, which we have now done, to be printed next to each species. (Paul Ellis gets the well-deserved credit for finalising the maps, and for printing them in the 2017 Annual Report.)

I am about just over half way so far. When I have completed the draft, I will then send the text, the images, and the maps to Ray Morris, of the Leicester Entomological Society. They specialise in 'setting' County books and booklets, and they print them in paper form, and staple them (free of charge). My next job will be to get funding, and if successful, proceed to a bound book.

No sightings for January/February, so no reports on species.

OTHER INSECTS AND INVERTEBRATES RECORDER Gill Chiverton

20 Victoria Road, Stamford PE9 1HB. Telephone: 01780 753820
E-mail: gill.chiverton@googlemail.com

No report this time, please continue sending in your records.

MAMMALS

RECORDER Linda Biddle

21 Waverley Gardens, Stamford PE9 1BH. Telephone: 01780 762108
E-mail: rnhs mammals@talktalk.net

January/February 2019



Badgers are active already, setts showing digging and nearby latrines, which suggests young are inside, and lots of tracks showing that the badgers are regularly leaving to forage for worms, etc. Unfortunately as usual there are also road casualties reported, from Great Casterton, and Barrow. At the end of January two **Otters** were observed from Shelduck Hide at RWNR, and in both January and February there were either spraint or otter prints on every mink raft on the Reserve, so there are obviously several individuals around. This is in line with the pattern we have seen for the last few years. In winter the otters are evident around the Reserve, but in the spring and summer there are fewer signs and sightings – they seem to be less active, or else they move away from the Reserve. There have been no reports of weasels this time, but there have been three sightings of **Stoats**: the first at Greetham valley golf club; second in New Field Lane Exton; and the third seen on the RNHS January walk near to Hambleton Old Hall.

At Langham two **Foxes** are regular visitors. A female with big white tail tip is videoed every night, and a darker male also appears frequently. A third fox with thin drooping tail called in twice, once at 11 pm and on another night at 7.00 am. They clearly stagger their visits so that no two appear at the same time, to avoid any friction between them. A large healthy fox also visited Barnstedt Drive Oakham early in February.

Very few **Rabbits** are reported, but lots of active holes were seen in the plantation near Walk Farm, and at Tolethorpe along the hedgerow. A dead rabbit was found in a barn at Exton Park in January. **Brown hare** are reported in the Pickworth, Thistleton, Exton and Barrow areas, and two were observed 'almost boxing' in mid-February.

A **Water Shrew** was found dead at RWNR near Lagoon 3, easily identified by its dark charcoal-coloured fur, and whitish underside, with a clear line separating the two colours, and a lovely white keel on its long dark thin tail. A **Common Shrew** was found in the garden shed at Bridge Street, Langham. **Long-tailed Fieldmice** (otherwise known as Woodmice) were present in the garage, garden and garden shed as well as the attic at Bridge Street Langham during January, but have not been seen more recently. **Grey Squirrels** were seen on the trail camera at Langham most days in January, and a few times in February, and were also reported from Exton, Pickworth, RWNR and Barrow.

Our irrepressible Vice president responded to my note that **Moles** were under-recorded by counting 650 molehills at Clipsham Park Avenue, and another 45 in a nearby grassy area. Other members also sent in sightings, from Exton, Langham, Barrow, RWNR and Prior's Coppice.

The **Water Voles** at Rutland Water are still doing well, all sites being monitored showing some positive signs (i.e. droppings on the rafts) through the winter months, and at Oakham Canal they are also still present.

A female **Muntjac** and her young fawn appeared very regularly during January at Langham, and others were seen at the Stone House Wing, and Wing Grange, as well as at Barrow in the Willows' garden, Prior's Coppice and Exton Park. At Exton, in Tunnely and Westland Woods, and at Pickworth, **Fallow Deer** have been seen, and sadly one was a road casualty on the A606 at Shacklewell.

Thank you all for your records: D & J Ball, A Biddle, C Gallimore, P Langstone, R Lemmon, M Markham, D Masters, T Mitcham, D Needham, L Park, P J Rudkin

BATS

RECORDER Jenny Harris

41 Woodland View, Oakham LE15 6EJ. Telephone: 01572 755274
E-mail: jennyharris221@gmail.com

January/February 2019

Late winter is a time when bats should be in hibernation, choosing cool, secluded sites where they will not be disturbed by predators or fluctuations in temperature. Extremes or rapid changes in temperature can put bats at risk of arousing from deep torpor, only to find no insects to feed on. This may have happened in the February mild spell, but it is possible that rapid cooling after sunset ensured that most bats returned to torpor quickly without wasting precious energy by sallying forth.

East Rutland hibernaculum

As usual, a small team of licensed 'batters' checked the east Rutland hibernaculum on 27 January and 17 February. The weather in January was normal for the period, the temperature on our survey day, at 10.00 am, being 3.5 °C. We found 15 bats of at least three species: one Daubenton's *Myotis daubentonii*, 10 Natterer's *M. nattereri*, and two Brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus* bats; a further two bats could not be identified because they were not fully visible. The two long-eared bats were roosting together, their ears tucked away almost out of sight. During the February survey the temperature at 10.00 am was 8 °C, rising to 12 °C by 1.00 pm; only seven bats were found on this occasion: two Daubenton's and two Natterer's. Niches which had previously contained bats were unoccupied, the bats having either moved out of the hibernaculum or into deeper, cooler recesses in the site.

Grounded bats

There were two grounded bats in Rutland, both in February. On the 8th a male Brown Long-eared was found in a vase in the lounge of a house in Barrowden Road, Ketton. It was lucky there was no water in the vase, but in fact it was the rustling movement of dried flowers that alerted the householder, who not only rescued the bat but fed it on live mealworms meant for her garden birds until she was able to contact me. As the bat only weighed 5.5 g (normal hibernation weight c. 9.0 g) she undoubtedly saved its life. On 15 February a female Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* was seen clinging to part of Oakham's Buttercross, in the Market Place, very low down. It weighed 3.4 g (expected weight at this time of year c. 5.0 g). It seemed to have little control of its left wing, although no broken bones were visible. By 28th it weighed 5.4 g and there are signs of healing of the left wing, so fingers crossed.

Bats in flight

There were two records of bats in flight, both in February. On 22nd a bat was flying round the garden in Ketton where the grounded Long-eared was found. It was filmed on an infra-red camera; although the screen-shot image was small it was almost certainly a Long-eared bat. Ann Tomlinson also noticed bats flying at dusk on Barrowden Road on 23rd and could see them well enough to be sure they were not Long-eared. In recent years Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle *P. pygmaeus* and Whiskered *M. mystacinus* bats have been recorded in the Aldgate/ Station Road area of Ketton so the bats could have been any of these species.

Hambleton Wood

An ambitious project to restore coppicing in Hambleton Wood, Rutland Water, was begun in winter 2017/18, and a further section of the work began in autumn 2018. It is planned to reintroduce coppice management to roughly 60% of the wood, a habitat where eight species of bats have been recorded during harp trapping for the National Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project: Daubenton's, Whiskered, Natterer's, Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Nathusius' Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared bat. It was thought likely that there could be tree roosts in the wood, with the attendant risk of felling them or leaving them isolated and there is also insect-rich foraging habitat on which these species rely. Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, who manage the wood on behalf of owners Anglian Water, arranged for a survey to be carried out on 02 and 03 February. The survey was organised by Nathalie Cossa, LRWT's bat expert, and Paul Trevor. LRWT staff from RW and Leicester Office were joined by members

of seven bat groups: Leicestershire and Rutland, Cambridgeshire, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire, several of them professional tree climbers that specialise in bat surveys. The weather was very mild and sunny. Only two bats were found, a Soprano Pip in a narrow, partially fallen branch which had formed a hollow from a rot hole about 9 m above the ground, and a Common Pip in a large 'woodcrete' bat box. A number of potential bat roost features were found and marked for retention.

This is rather a long-winded report, bearing in mind so few actual bats have been found, but I hope you will find it of interest.

My thanks to Ann Tomlinson and the owners of the house in Ketton, together with everyone who took part in the hibernaculum and Hambleton Wood surveys.

REPORTS ON RNHS FIELD TRIPS IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY

Sunday 13 January

New Year Walk at Hambleton Peninsula

A cool morning with cloudy skies and a strong breeze blowing from the west saw 18 RNHS members out for a winter stroll, meeting near the Old Hall Hambleton to walk along the perimeter track and see what we could find.

First were a few **Teal**, some **Wigeon**, and an unidentified sandpiper feeding on the edge of the water. The strong wind had encouraged a large flock of **Tufted Duck**, over 300 strong, to shelter behind the Old Hall headland, and they had been joined by **Grebes**, both **Great Crested** and a smaller grebe, later identified as **Red-necked**, wigeon and **Mallard**, so we spent quite a while watching their activities. The birds were startled and put up by **Lesser Black-backed gulls** overflying, and a flock of **Canada Geese** flew across the water. **Greylag** and **Egyptian Geese** were also seen. As we followed the track into the wood **Muntjac** tracks were observed, and **Badger** scufflings and tracks crossed our path. At openings among the trees the water was visible, and we had beautiful views of male and female **Goldeneye** as they bobbed up and down on the waves, disappearing below the surface frequently to feed. In the distance were a couple of **Scaup**, and several **Gadwall**.

A shower of misty rain came over and we made for the shelter of the wood, but it soon blew over. In the woodland neat holes had been drilled by woodpeckers into old silver birches, and **King Alfred's cake** fungi were growing on fallen timber. We walked through a newly planted area, and then through the old hazel coppice. Here we saw several grey squirrel dreys, large leafy collections in forks of the branches. At the side of the path some **Herb Robert** was flowering, giving a splash of pink and a taste of spring among the brown, and flowering **Hazel** catkins in a sheltered spot shed pollen when touched.

Large bat boxes had been erected on some of the trees, one with a mysterious hole and 'patching up' around it on the front. This was examined by several members, who came up with various explanations, from wasps and bees attempting to paste over the hole, to human intervention – but the real reason remains a mystery. Perhaps we shall be able to explain later with help from the bat people!

By 12.00 noon we had returned to our cars after a good start to 2019. The fresh air had blown away our cobwebs, and gave us all a good appetite for lunch.



Saturday 16 February

RNHS visit to Egleton Birdwatching Centre



Lloyd Park, Rutland Park Conservation Officer. Photo, L Biddle

The morning promised well – light broken cloud, and a temperature that for February was exceptional – 10 degrees at 9.30 am! 12 members met our leader Lloyd Park, Rutland Water Conservation Officer, at the Egleton Birdwatching Centre to take a walk to some of the hides to see what was on the water.

Birdsong was everywhere as we walked to the first hide, a **Song Thrush** belting out his tune, and **Great Tits** ‘belling’ – a loud repetitive two-note call – **Blue Tits** tsee-tseeing and **Dunnock** and **Robin** with their thin high songs among the bare hawthorn branches. From the first hide the views of wildfowl were great – smart **Pintail** male and female upending to collect food from beneath the water, lots of **Tufted Duck**, **Teal**, **Coot**, **Mallard** and lovely **Gadwall**, showing their immaculate black and brown plumage as the sun peeped through and lit up the water. A **Grey Heron** was standing on the edge of the water on a nearby island. We spent quite some time here, enjoying the views and the activities of the birds as they went about their business.

En route to the next hide we heard the bold insistent song of a **Wren**, and the scree... of a **Tree Creeper** – though even our leader’s sharp eyes and ears failed to locate the secretive little bird!

At the next hide looking across open water to the far reedbeds, we were treated to excellent views of a **Great White Egret** – its great size and yellow bill distinctive in comparison to the rest of the wildfowl. **Pochard**, **Wigeon**, **Great Crested Grebe** were most numerous here and the strikingly smart black and white **Goldeneye** submerged and popped up so that tracking their movements with binoculars was quite difficult.

On the bird feeders at the edge of the reeds male and female **Reed Buntings** flittered about, flocking like sparrows as they fed on the platforms. Our final stop was at one of the newer lagoons, where the water was shallower and the islands numerous. At this point the sun was behind us, and the light perfect for seeing the colourful plumage of the birds. Here beautiful **Goosander** cruised along, low in the water, the males with blue-black heads against whitish bodies, the females or redheads with orange-brown crested heads and greyer plumage. **Canada Geese**, **Swans** and lots of gulls, were seen; **Black Headed Gulls** with breeding plumage already obvious, **Common Gulls** among them making up the numbers. Two **Curlew** flew across in front of us. Most spectacular of all were a flotilla of **Smew**, two splendid males and three females, which gradually approached the hide, diving down and reappearing, getting closer and closer so that we could eventually see every line in the black and white plumage of the males, and the light patches under the beaks of the females, as they postured and showed off in preparation for the breeding season.

The conditions had been ideal, and our leader expertly described and pointed out the wildfowl so that we all learned new species. The morning had passed amazingly quickly, and in all we identified a total of 62 species in just over 2 hours.



Smew approaching. Photo, L Biddle



A Great White Egret and a Little Egret. Photo, D Cotter.



Photo, D Cotter



Photo, D Cotter

RNHS CONTACTS

Chairman

21 Waverley Gardens, Stamford PE9 1BH
01780 762108

Linda Biddle

abiddle21@talktalk.net

Secretary

Position vacant

Treasurer/Membership

24 Burrough Rd, Somerby, Melton Mowbray LE14 2PP
01664 454532

Margaret Conner

mjconner100@gmail.com

Programme Secretary

Position vacant

Website Editor

12 Tees Close, Oakham, LE15 6SP
07535 508932

Peter Scott

peter.scott27@bopenworld.com

Fieldfare Editor

Old Hunt's Maltings, Water St, Stamford PE9 2NJ
01780 482048

Hendrina Ellis

hendrinawe@gmail.com

Wildlife Recorders

*Contact details can be found on
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