

West Oxfordshire Field Club

www.thefieldclub.org.uk



Newsletter No. 107 Spring 2018

EDITORIAL

I began this editorial in the midst of the March snow. A blizzard of snowflakes was dancing across the rooftops, swirling like smoke – a murmuration of snowflakes! A blackbird sat huddled like a dark snowball under a snowhole under the mock orange, yet two pigeons were billing and cooing on the fence as if it were a spring day. Within a couple of days of the snow melting, there were four species of bumblebees on the winter heather, and the first Small Tortoiseshell of the year. And another sign of spring – the sight and glorious sound of a skylark high above the garden.

Today the temperature is soaring into the 20s, swallows are circling the gravel pits en route north, and warblers are moving in. There are columns of gnats cavorting above the hedgerows, and bluetits gathering moss from windowsills for their nests – the robin has beat them to it, and has been sitting on eggs for some time. On the water meadows curlews are scouting for nest sites, and lapwings are perfecting their distraction displays. There is still a lot of water lying on the fields, and the Club's annual visit to see

the fritillaries has had to be cancelled once more.

I was surprised to learn that billions of hoverflies migrate to and from the British Isles every year. They are important pollinators, and some species help to control crop pests. Recent work by the University of Oxford has revealed that they carry three common bee diseases, and there are fears that those species feeding on the same flower species as bees may help to spread these diseases, which are partly responsible for the big decline of pollinators in recent years. In the many years that I have been living here, honeybees have become much less common in my garden, but bumblebees have increased in number, and over the changing seasons there is a great variety of hoverflies.

In the house another change has been taking place – the large house spiders are seldom seen now, but many corners of the ceiling and spaces behind desk and bookcases are home to spindly spiders that spin fluffy, sticky webs that hang down like the ones seen in ghost stories and fairground Rides of

Death. These Pholcid or ‘daddy long legs spiders’ have earned the nickname ‘cannibal spiders’, as they will eat all the other spiders in the house, including house spiders larger than themselves. It seems that these apparently delicate spiders are responsible for the decline in our house spiders!

Dedicated recording is needed to accurately find out which species are declining and which are flourishing. The splendid

programme on eggs recently hosted by David Attenborough would not have been possible but for centuries of egg-collecting, and collections of insects and dried plants also give valuable insights into changing environments and evolution. There are many ways to get involved in recording wildlife – it is an enjoyable way to contribute to conservation.

Jill Bailey

YOUR NEWSLETTER

A big thank you to all who contributed to this newsletter, a good advertisement for the Club. Please can you let me have your reports of walks and other Club outings by mid-September 2018 for the Autumn newsletter. E-mailed flora and fauna lists in a single column, not in a table or spaced with tabs,

please. If a plant list contains both English and Latin names, a table or Excel file (two columns) is fine, but for other lists, please do not use Excel. If this is not convenient, please post handwritten or printed reports to the address given on your programme.

Jill Bailey (Newsletter Editor)
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REPORTS OF FIELD MEETINGS

Geology Walk at Ardley Quarry and Ardley Wood 24 September 2017

Lesley Dunlop of Oxfordshire Geology Trust led us on a fascinating walk through Ardley Quarry and wood, a SSSI managed by BBOWT. Encompassing the former quarry and railway cutting, the reserve contains a range of habitats, from ancient woodland and limestone grassland to patches of wetland. A range of rocks from the Jurassic period is exposed here, including various types of limestone and mudstones derived from sediments laid down in a shallow sea and on the mudbanks along the ancient shoreline. The floor of the quarry provides a sheltered habitat, while the railway cutting offers sunny banks of limestone grassland. Fossilised footprints near the quarry have shown that dinosaurs roamed the area some 168 million years ago.

We began our walk in the ancient woodland, then crossed the sheltered grassland to reach the railway embankment. It was indicative of our uncertain climate that we found both early- and late-flowering species in full bloom. There were unexpected early spring flowers such as the Early Dog Violet and Creeping Buttercup, together with later species like Autumn Gentian and Autumn Hawkbit. A less common species was the Blue Fleabane, and we also found Dragon's Teeth, a native species that has been introduced to the reserve. The damp clayey areas were wet enough to support Watermint and Soft Rush, and Great Crested Newts have been found here.

The rich flora of the unimproved grassland habitat is maintained by a vigorous programme of scrub clearance to prevent taller vegetation encroaching. The reward is a botanist's delight.

Jill Bailey

Plant species seen:

Stinking Hellebore
 Common Ragwort
 Woody Nightshade
 Broad-leaved Willowherb
 Rosebay Willowherb
 Wild Strawberry
 Early Dog Violet
 Wood Avens/Herb Bennet
 White Clover
 Smooth Hawksbeard
 Rough Hawkbit
 Wood Melick
 Rough Meadow-grass
 Hard Rush
 Bush Vetch
 Greater Stitchwort
 Sanicle
 Wood Spurge
 Ploughman's Spikenard
 Greater Bird's-foot trefoil
 Dragon's Teeth
 Stinking Iris
 Dog Rose
 Bramble
 Lesser Knapweed

Dandelion
 Field Scabious
 Wood Scabious
 False Brome
 Rough Hawksbeard
 Dogwood
 Autumn Hawkbit
 Common Centaury
 Monkshood/Columbine
 Hedge Bindweed
 Nettle-leaved Bellflower
 Perforate St. John's Wort
 White Dead-nettle
 Hogweed
 Spotted Medick
 Knotgrass
 Stinging Nettle
 Yarrow
 Broad-leaved Dock
 Creeping Thistle
 Ribwort Plantain
 Welled Thistle
 Creeping Buttercup
 Bartsia
 Self-heal
 Germander Speedwell

Common Daisy
 Black Medick
 Agrimony
 White Campion
 Cut-leaved Cranesbill
 Goatsbeard
 Fairy Flax
 Scarlet Pimpernel
 Eyebright
 Blue Fleabane
 Autumn Gentian
 Fleabane
 Mouse-ear Chickweed
 Wild Parsnip
 Water Mint

Fungus seen:

Shaggy Inkcap

Insects seen:

Grasshopper

Birds heard:

Jay
 Nuthatch

Snelsmore Common Fungus Foray 22 October 2018

Peter Creed led us on a fungus foray to Snelsmore Common. At least twenty species were found:

Brown Birch Bolete	Fleecy Milkcap	Peppery Bolete
Woolly Milkcap	Fly Agaric	Shaggy Cap
Fibre-cap	Grey Milkcap	False Deathcap
Slippery Jack Bolete	Mild Milkcap	The Blusher
Earth Ball	Bonfire fungus	Milkcap
False Chanterelle	Sulphur Tuft	Lactarius controversus
Fragile Brittle-gill	Dung Roundhead	

We also saw several dragonflies (about 6 Common Darters and a Southern Darter). There was also a single Red Admiral by the car park at the end of our visit.

Malcolm Brownsword

Morecambe Bay 20 – 23 October

This report should perhaps be called ‘Battered by Brian’, or better ‘Give me sunshine...’ – for the twelve of us who went to Morecambe Bay last October, Led by Roy Jackson and David Roberts, were well and truly battered by the weather for much of the weekend.

Some changes were apparent in Morecambe since we went there in 2015. The promenade had had a makeover with a smart, new sea wall and – to my great disappointment – the shelter just across the road from the Bay hotel, which was excellent for watching birds on the beach at high tide, had gone. However, the new sea wall had undoubtedly proved itself only a few days earlier when the north west coast had been assaulted by the remains of hurricane Ophelia which resulted in extensive flooding.

The first noteworthy sighting came on the Friday afternoon when we walked, against a brisk cold breeze, down to the stone jetty where a rather lonely looking male Eider was swimming off the end. It then started to rain and the weather forecast for the weekend was not looking good.

It wasn’t actually raining the Saturday morning and, as planned, we went to the RSPB reserve at Leighton Moss. Ophelia had raised the water levels in all the lakes and some of the paths were flooded, although passable. Most of the muddy places were covered, which reduced the chances of seeing waders but some members of the group scored the hat-trick of Redshanks, a Spotted Redshank and a Greenshank on a small

island in front of the Causeway hide. They then scored again by seeing an Otter eating an eel right in front of the same hide!

After lunch it started to rain in earnest. It wasn’t easy to see much through the rain, and impossible to open the windows in some of the hides, but five Snipe showed at the Jackson hide. After that, tea, cake and a chance to dry out in the cafeteria were more than welcome.

It had stopped raining by the time we got back to the cars and we decided to stop at the disused quarry (now a local nature reserve) at Wharton Crag on the way back to the hotel to look for Peregrines. Some flew overhead several times and one went down in front of the rock face. Remarkably, even though the light was fading and it was dark grey bird dropping down against dark grey rock under a dark grey sky, Sue managed to see where it landed and we managed to get a good look at it through a telescope.

Storm Brian arrived with a vengeance during the night. On Sunday morning the wind was about 50 mph and a battle to walk against, not to mention being sand blasted on the promenade. The plan had been to go to Red Bank and look at the mudflats and salt marshes but, given the weather, Roy made the sensible decision to go back to Leighton Moss. We stopped at Wharton Crag on the way and again the Peregrines obliged.

The wind had dropped a bit by the afternoon and some good overall views were to be had from the top of the Sky

Tower. We were on the lookout for a Purple Heron which had been resident at Leighton Moss for a few weeks, but no luck, although three Marsh Harriers were seen and some Bearded Tits on the causeway where they come to grit trays (they need grit for their digestion). A quick visit to the Jackson hide gave some good views of Snipe and a Red Deer stag and four females in the distance.

Having exhausted the hides in the main part of the reserve, we made our way over a very rutted and flooded track to the Allen and Eric Morecambe hides. Unfortunately, probably because the water levels were high, there was little there. A large flock of geese flew in but too far away to see exactly what they were.

On the way back to the hotel we stopped at Hest Bank, which is a productive site, especially at high tide. Even though the tide was some way out there were certainly plenty of birds on the mud but the wind was so penetrating we decided not to hang around.

The weather on Monday morning was back to normal – overcast with light rain and not too cold or windy. Before heading home we spent half an hour or so at a small turn-off from the coast road at the northern end of town. It's quite a good spot and there were plenty of birds, although rather far out. Nevertheless, I counted about a hundred Curlews.

On the way back, several of us stopped at the WWT reserve at Martin Mere, a few miles east of Southport. A number of other species were added to the list, notably Tree Sparrow, Ruff and Pink-footed Goose, as well as a lot – possibly twenty – Snipe from the United Utilities hide.

Despite the weather the weekend produced a respectable species count, all things considered, so thanks to Roy and David for leading the trip.

A note on Morecambe

Morecambe Bay is a well-known birdwatching area. Eric Morecambe, who took his stage name from the town, was a keen birdwatcher and the town has developed a birdy theme. The jetty has a number of pieces of bird-themed sculpture and street art including magpie hopscotch (we never did figure that out) and the tongue-twister 'Whilst Whimbrels wade idle Eiders amble' carved in granite. There's also a walkway through a car park called 'A flock of words' with quotations on the pavement from everyone from the Bible to Shakespeare and Roger McGough, all relating one way or another to birds – all quite literary and educational. And of course the slightly larger than life statue of Eric Morecambe, complete with binoculars, on the promenade is guaranteed to cheer you up, even in the worst of weather.

John Cobb

Birds seen:

Little Grebe	Water Rail (heard)	Marsh Tit
Great Crested Grebe	Moorhen	Coal Tit
Cormorant	Coot	Blue Tit
Little Egret	Oystercatcher	Great Tit
Great White Egret	Black-headed Gull	Nuthatch
Grey Heron	Lesser black-backed	Treecreeper
Mute Swan	Gull	Magpie
Whooper Swan	Herring Gull	Jackdaw
Pink-footed Goose	Greater black-	Rook
Greylag Goose	backed Gull	Carrion Crow
Shelduck	Stock Dove	Starling
Wigeon	Woodpigeon	House Sparrow
Gadwall	Collared Dove	Tree Sparrow
Teal	Kingfisher	Chaffinch
Mallard	Green Woodpecker	Greenfinch
Pintail	Skylark	Goldfinch
Shoveler	Meadow Pipit	Siskin
Pochard	Pied Wagtail	Linnet
Tufted Duck	Wren	Lesser Redpoll
Eider	Dunnock	Bullfinch
Red-breasted	Robin	Reed Bunting
Merganser	Stonechat	
Goosander	Blackbird	Mammals
Marsh Harrier	Song Thrush	
Sparrowhawk	Cetti's Warbler	Red deer
Buzzard	(heard)	Otter
Kestrel	Goldcrest	Grey Squirrel
Peregrine	Bearded Tit	
Pheasant	Long-tailed Tit	

Roy Jackson

Batsford Arboretum 5 November 2017

Eight Field Club members turned up at Batsford on a beautiful blue sky morning after the first frost this autumn. It has been a long, slow change this autumn, so there was still a good spread of colours throughout the arboretum, although a good number of the maples had lost their leaves, some still remained and were falling fast after the

morning frost. Beech trees were still showing beautiful golds and orange and there is such an amazing variety of different specimens there, most of which are well labelled.

David Roberts

RSPB Reserve, Othmoor 17 December 2017

When four of us met up in the reserve car park for this walk after a week of freezing temperatures following heavy snow the previous weekend, the car park and footpaths were slippery, with icy patches.

After watching small bird species, such as Dunnocks, Blue and Great Tits, Chaffinches and a Wren, flitting about in nearby bushes, we made our way carefully along the tracks. It became immediately obvious that because the ground was still frozen and pools and ditches were covered in ice, bird numbers on the reserve were drastically lower than usual for the time of year. As we made our way carefully along the track towards the bridleway – the reserve’s elevated east/west path – we saw a Green Woodpecker in the Closes field and a Wren skulking about in the bottom of the hedgerow. When we reached the bird feeding station, sited further on in the northwest corner of the Car Park Field, there were tit and finch species visiting the feeders suspended from a tree, and several Pheasants on the ground beneath them feeding on any food that dropped down. Beyond the bridleway, on the large area of Greenaways, there were just two Mute Swans and a couple of large flocks of Canada Geese, and a bit further along the path, a hovering Kestrel, a Red Kite and a distant Marsh Harrier.

When we reached the bird-watching hide, many Reed Buntings and Chaffinches, plus several Linnets and Yellowhammers, including at least three brightly coloured males, could be seen feeding on the

remainder of bird seed that had been scattered on the track just east of the hide several days previously. This seed is provided under a national Agri-environment Scheme, a project in which the RSPB is involved to help wild farmland bird species survive the winter and hopefully reverse their declining numbers. Looking west from the hide, over Ashgrave, a large mainly pastoral area, a lone Pied Wagtail was the only bird on the pools where usually there’d be lots of wildfowl of several species. It was finding something edible on the surface of the ice. As on Greenaways, in the distance there was a large flock of grazing Canada Geese.

Big Otmoor, a large fenced-in field to the north of the bridleway, usually popular with Lapwing, Golden Plover and dabbling duck species, was deserted. However, on our way to the first viewing screen that overlooks pools situated in the reserve’s main reedbeds, a Hare trotted along the path towards us and then veered away out of sight, only to be followed by a Fox taking the same route. On reaching the viewing screen, just one nearby small area of water in the pools was ice-free. Congregated in this were numbers of Shoveler, Teal, Mallard, a lone Little Grebe, and probing the short vegetation at the water’s edge, several Common Snipe.

While standing at the screen our feet became cold, and we soon made our way back to the cars. We had observed 34 species of birds, despite the low numbers, and the 2 mammal species.

Bird species seen:

Dunnock	Mute Swan	Yellowhammer
Blue Tit	Canada Geese	Pied Wagtail
Great Tit	Kestrel	Lapwing
Chaffinch	Red Kite	Golden Plover
Wren	Marsh Harrier	Shoveler
Green Woodpecker	Reed Bunting	Teal
Pheasant	Linnet	Mallard

*David Rolfe***Visit to Over Norton Park Farm and Walk Farm 14 January 2018**

This was the Club's second winter visit to Mike and Sarah Kettlewell's farm at Over Norton, where farmland birds are fed throughout the year. The weather was marginally better than January 2016, when we struggled to see the birds in the pervading gloom. It was very cold, but nevertheless nineteen people came along, including several visitors.

The farm has been in stewardship schemes for at least 17 years to increase biodiversity. The bird feeding programme includes millet all year round to help Tree Sparrows and Reed Bunting, and from December to May

mixed feeding to attract Chaffinches, Yellowhammers, Linnets, Skylarks and Corn Buntings.

Our thanks to Mike for his warm welcome and for giving us his time. He is very modest about his contribution to increasing diversity on his farm and it is a pleasure to be there. Next time.....let's go in the summer to enjoy the profusion of wildflowers as well as the birds!

*Mary Elford***Bird species seen:**

Blackbird	Linnet	Stock Dove
Blue Tit	Magpie	Wood Pigeon
Great Tit	Pheasant	Yellowhammer
Brambling	Raven	Collard Dove
Buzzard	Red Kite	Kestrel
Carrion Crow	Reed Bunting	Pied Wagtail
Chaffinch	Robin	Grey Wagtail
Duncock	Rook	Wren
Goldfinch	Song Thrush	

*David Rolfe and Mike Kettlewell***Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust 4 February 2018**

We were very fortunate with the weather on this Sunday compared with the RSPB trip two weeks before, when it rained all day after snowing on the journey there. We had a mostly blue sky day, but it was very cold with a North wind blowing and this blew through the hide window flaps when we had them open. The wonderful thing about Slimbridge is the number of hides to shelter in whilst watching the birds and the very good café facilities there

to revive from the cold when needed – "luxury birding" and always very enjoyable.

Eight of us turned up and we started off in the Peng Observatory, where it is good to get used to the large numbers of birds to be seen at Slimbridge. We worked our way down towards the Holden Tower and the first hide, Rushy Hide, we had some Ruff and began seeing mass flocks of Lapwing, with Golden Plover

and Dunlin. Further down from the Robbie Garnet Hide we had large numbers of Pintail grouped together. Opposite in the Willow Hide by the feeders two Water Rail obliged for some of us, in and out of the reeds as they often are there.

The Holden Tower was good for having far reaching views of the Severn and Forest of Dean and the area between the river and the tower, known as The Dumbles. This contains lots of geese, swans and ducks and I had the fleeting view of a Little Stint, as it flew past the hide, the only view of one on that day. The Zeiss Hide had good views of two Peregrines once you had got your eye in, plus a view of White-fronted Geese way off to the left and good views of five Cranes, both flying and on the ground, majestic looking birds – good to see them back after the reintroduction

programme, which is still ongoing. The reeds in front of the hide, where it used to be the best place to see Bittern before it was cut back rather drastically as part of ongoing maintenance. The White-fronted Geese were best seen from Kingfisher Hide – they were a lot closer and the lone Red-breasted Goose amongst them stood out very well.

South Lake was good for seeing Avocets, Black-tailed Godwits and Snipe, but there was no sign of the Glossy Ibis that had been showing well there over quite a long period of time. Apparently it had flown off quite early in the morning and had not returned.

A good day was had by all.

Bird species seen:

Cormorant	Buzzard	Black-headed Gull
Grey Heron	Kestrel	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Mute Swan	Peregrine	Stock Dove
Bewick's Swan	Pheasant	Woodpigeon
White-fronted Goose	Water Rail	Duncock
Greylag Goose	Moorhen	Robin
Canada Goose	Coot	Blackbird
Barnacle Goose	Crane	Long-tailed Tit
Red-breasted Goose	Oystercatcher	Blue Tit
Shelduck	Avocet	Magpie
Wigeon	Golden Plover	Jackdaw
Gadwall	Lapwing	Rook
Teal	Little Stint	Carrion Crow
Mallard	Dunlin	Starling
Pintail	Ruff	House Sparrow
Shoveler	Snipe	Chaffinch
Pochard	Black-tailed Godwit	Greenfinch
Tufted Duck	Redshank	

David Roberts

Snowdrops at Sherborne 18 February 2018

The fog had cleared by the time we gathered at the Ewepen Barn car park but despite a few attempts the sun was unable to break through

the cloud and the weather remained dull for the whole of the walk. The objective of our visit to this National Trust property, the snowdrops,

did not disappoint – they were flowering in their thousands in drifts up and down the banks of the old quarries now covered in trees and shrubs. Most of them were doubles. In one area many of the clumps were blind, probably because here they were in more shade and elsewhere in the wood.

Besides the snowdrops, we saw many other things of interest. As we walked away from the car park David Roberts drew our attention to the line of young Beech trees and how they had been badly damaged by deer. Somebody remarked on the prolific growth of twiggy branches around the trunks of the lime trees (probably *Tilia x europaea*) out in the open parkland. This growth is very characteristic of Common Lime and is due to epicormic growth. Once in the wood we came across other late-winter flowers – Dog’s Mercury and Creeping Comfrey (*Symphytum grandiflorum*) [sorry, I misidentified this as Russian Comfrey] and, later, an early-spring flower – Daffodils, which appeared very like the wild variety (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*), their flowers being medium-sized with creamy-yellow outer petals and a darker yellow trumpet, but it is difficult to be sure. Just by the first clump of daffodils we came across was a dead twig sporting a few Scarlet Elf Cups (*Sarcoscypha coccinea*). The bracket fungus, Turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*) with a lovely blue margin was seen

on dead wood. In many places we noticed small clumps of leaves, taller than the ones of the Bluebells, growing up through the leaf litter. These are probably Sicilian Honey Garlic (*Nectaroscordum siculum*), known to grow here. Some of the old Beech trees are showing their antiquity. One in particular on the boundary was looking very knarled, with branches broken off and others still attached but reaching right down to the ground. In the grounds of Sherborne House there were two more flowers – Winter Aconites (*Eranthis hyemalis*) and crocuses (probably *C. tommasinianus*).

Our knowledgeable ornithologists identified at least 15 different birds in the wood, down in the village and by the River Windrush. A Skylark was singing near the car park, a lovely reminder that spring is not far away. The birds seen or just heard in the wood were: Robin, Nuthatch, Pied Wagtail, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit; down in the village Rooks and Great Tit; and by the river Mute Swans, A flock of Wigeon (approximately 20), Mallards, Teal, Dabchicks (2), Coot and Little Egret.

Even the footpaths were very muddy this was a very enjoyable walk through this very popular National Trust property. Thank you, Mary and David, for bringing us here to share the natural beauty of this special place at this time of year.

Brenda Betteridge

Early Spring Walk from Adlestrop 11 March 2018

Just four members joined Ken, Brenda and their two lively granddaughters on a beautiful sunny morning for an interesting walk around Adlestrop. Where was everyone on such a lovely day? Perhaps it was because it was Mother’s Day. Starting from the Village Hall car park, we followed footpaths through fields with very well defined ridge and furrow,

showing reverse S bends where the medieval farmers turned their teams of oxen. The furrows between the ridges were distinctly boggy, and overall it was a pretty squelchy walk.

Our route took us past Chastleton House, and in the churchyard we saw an interesting

phenomenon. Ken brushed past a yew tree, and was surprised to see what looked like a cloud of smoke. It wasn't John's pipe – the Yews were in flower and the "smoke" was actually pollen coming out in large quantities. We continued round in a loop back to Adlestrop, through woods and fields. It was too early for much in the way of flora, but we spotted encouraging signs of early spring, and the birds were starting to sing again.

A damp wood near the end of the walk was full of moss, much of it climbing up any vertical stems in its path and looking like a miniature forest. This was identified as Creeping Feather-moss (*Amblystegium serpens*). We passed two geocaches, although a sign on the second said it had been moved to avoid disturbance to lizard habitat. On our return to Adlestrop we passed the bus shelter containing the sign from the long-closed station, and a GWR station bench, with a plaque containing Edward Thomas's famous poem.



Daphne laureola picture by John Cobb

Plant species seen:

Snowdrops	Fool's watercress (not in flower)	White deadnettle
Hazel catkins	Germander speedwell	<i>Daphne laureola</i>
Dandelion	Lesser celandine	
Daisy	Primrose	

Fungi seen:

Jelly fungus
Turkeytail

Birds seen or heard:

Dunnock	Robin	Raven
Blue tit	Chaffinch	Wood pigeon
Magpie	Rook	Linnet
Blackbird	Skylark	House sparrow
Buzzard	Yellowhammer	Great tit
Kestrel	Green woodpecker	

Sue Morton

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Skylarks' Nests

I found my first Skylark nest in a cattle-grazed pasture while working on a dairy farm in the Thames valley in West Oxfordshire in May 1967. It contained a clutch of four eggs (illustrated), which I monitored through to the successfully fledging of all four young. The second nest, again containing a clutch of four eggs, was sited on the same farm in June 1969, but in a water meadow. After an unusually heavy thunderstorm, the nest became water logged (illustrated) and was subsequently deserted.

Starting in the summer of 1976, I worked on a large estate in Lincolnshire, being involved in their pea vining enterprise. Depending on how the season went, my employment started in the latter half of June, and finished by mid-August. This I continued until 1996, after which pea growing on the estate ceased. My main task was sampling these pea fields to determine the order in which they were harvested. I did this by walking diagonally across each field as and when required. The total area was in the region of 1,000 acres. The bird species most frequently nesting in these fields were predominantly Skylarks, but also Corn Buntings, Yellow Wagtails, Pheasants and occasionally Red-legged Partridge. Nests were discovered almost without exception by flushing the sitting birds, which were generally incubating, but occasionally laying.

The Skylark nests found contained clutches of either three or four eggs. These were marked for future reference, as were the nests of other species. In July 1992 I located a Skylark nest

containing a clutch of five eggs (illustrated). As this was a one-off in my experience I wondered how frequently this occurred. Consulting the literature, "The Egg collectors of Great Britain and Ireland: an update" by A.C. Cole and W. M. Trobe, 2011, I noted with interest that Michael J. Dawson, who specialised in the Skylark, had recorded 35 sets in an interesting series that included a clutch of 5!

John Campbell kindly gave me the following analysis from the Museum Service data of 217 Skylark nests examined:

Sets of 3 eggs 68 (31.3%)

Sets of 4 eggs 131 (60.4%)

Sets of 5 eggs 18 (8.3%)

So only 8.3% contained 5 eggs. Several of these 5s were taken in Oxfordshire and southern England, not from northern latitudes, where one might expect to find larger clutches.

I assume that many of the early nests in the pea fields were successful, but few later in the season, owing to the actions of farm machinery. In my efforts to save some of the nests I located, I always had the full support of my fellow workers, the estate managers and the owners. Small strips of peas were left around nests containing eggs and sometimes young where feasible, and broods successfully fledged. This happened with Corn Bunting and Yellow Wagtail as well as Skylark. The illustration shows a well-camouflaged nest of young Skylarks in a pea field habitat with significantly Lincoln cathedral in the background.

ADRIAN - SKYLARK PICTURES ARE IN SEPARATE FILES

First picture is Oxon 1967, second is Waterlogged site nest, both to go at end of first paragraph.

Nest with 5 eggs is to go at end of penultimate paragraph.

Site – pea field with cathedral in distance is to go centre below article and before Graham's name, which needs to be on right like the rest.

PLANT PICS FOR ADLESTROP ARTICLE NEED TO GO IN BETWEEN LAST AND PENULTIMATE PARAGRAPHS.

I'VE ALSO GIVEN YOU A FEW OF MY OWN PICTURES IN CASE YOU NEED MORE – THESE CAN GO IN THE ARDLEY QUARRY ARTICLE. I DON'T HAVE PICTURE EDITING SOFTWARE ON THE PC AND TO BUSY TO GET OUT MAC, SO I'VE CROPPED THEM IN WORD – SO YOU CAN SEE HOW TO USE THEM.

Cut-leaved Cranesbill and Field Scabious and Ox-eye Daisy go with the Ardley Quarry walk. The Celandines would look good quite large at the end of my editorial, like we used the fritillaries in last Spring's newsletter.

The violet is an extra – not even sure what species – in case you need a filler.