

THE LEEDS NATURALIST

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 10

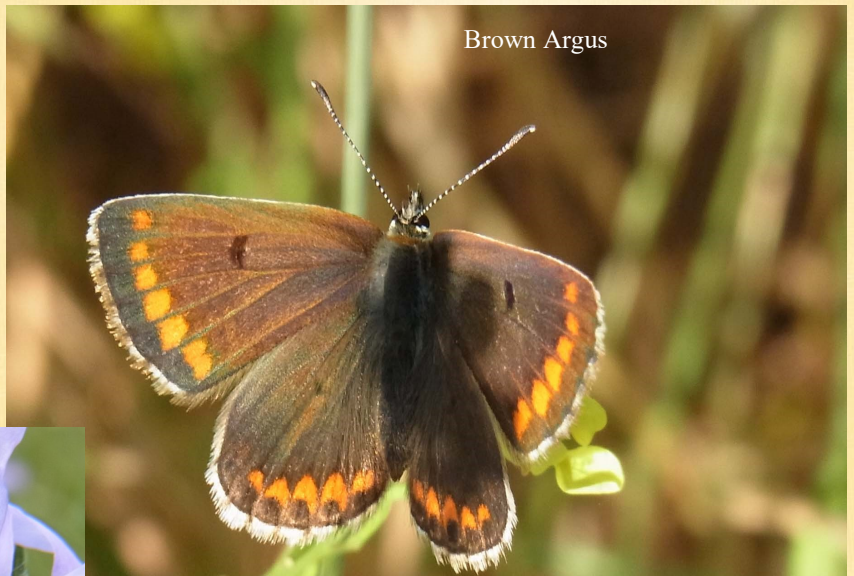
Field trip to Ledsham Dale on 10th August 2016

This meeting was attended by 6 members. The day was overcast with only light winds. Rain began as the meeting headed for its traditional pub lunch.. Perhaps because of the weather but mainly because of the late date some of the usual highlights were not present, notably Autumn Ladies Tresses and Marbled White butterfly. There was no visible trace of the Pasque flower or of its enclosure.

But there were compensations. A male Brown Argus was the first for some years but there were few other butterflies. The large cuckoo bees, *Bombus bohemicus* and *B. vestalis* were plentiful. A magnificent *Volucella inanis* was present together with *V. pellucens*, lots of *Eristalis arbustorum*, *Syrphus vitripennis* and *Epistrophe grossulariae*. Good numbers of Meadow grasshoppers, mostly in late instars, was an indication of grassland quality. Two dragonfly species, *Aeshna mixta* and *A. grandis* were hunting over the reserve.

Common buzzard and a distant Yellowhammer were the only birds noted.

Brown Argus



Bombus bohemicus male



Volucella inanis

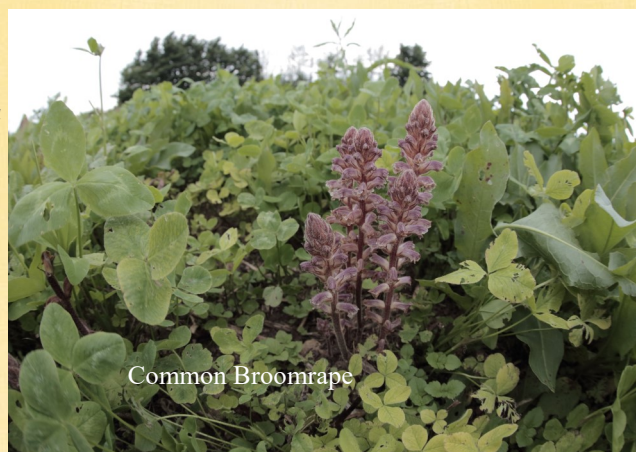


Botany Report for 2016

Phyll Abbott writes:

Our field meetings were rather disappointing botanically. At Ledsham the grass had grown tall and was smothering many of the smaller plants, and there was no sign of the Pasque flower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*). Similarly at Hetchell Wood we had to search diligently for another of our rarities, the Thistle Broomrape (*Orobanche reticulata*). And we found only two flowering spikes.

On a more positive note, I was told about some Common Broomrape (*Orobanche minor*) in a field near Tadcaster. There were several patches, some large some small, parasitising the clover crop amongst which it was growing. Quite impressive!



Butterflies Report for 2016

Peter Lerner writes:

It is difficult to write a report on butterflies in Leeds in 2016; very few records have been received and the number of site visits I have made was quite small. Several species were not reported during the year – the most likely reason being the lack of field work rather than local extinction.

(The figures in brackets after the name of some species are from Butterfly Conservation's "big butterfly count" and represent the percentage increase + or decrease – rom the 2015 count).

Skippers The Small Skipper appeared to be doing quite well in areas where I saw it, but the Large Skipper, as usual, was seen in smaller numbers. There is a possibility that the Essex Skipper is now resident in Yorkshire. I tried to look at the antennae of a few skippers to check for the Essex's black tips, but it's quite difficult to do, and I didn't find any.

Whites I have no Orange Tip records for 2016, a very strange situation. Males particularly are great wanderers and easily indentified in-flight so for me not to have seen one is odd to say the least. Have numbers fallen, or is it me?

No records of Brimstone (-20) from its stronghold in east Leeds and only one report of a wandering male. It is difficult to say much about other whites, but the Green-veined white was seen less frequently than the Large white (+2) or Small white(+15).

Blues A very poor year for all the Blues in my experience. No reports of Common Blue (-55) or Small Copper (-30). No hair-streaks reported except for a new site for the Purple Hairstreak seen on two occasions at Rodley NR, but the actual location of the oak tree from which these butterflies originate is not known. Holly Blue (-48) appeared here and there, but the best record is of 5 or 6 in a Headingley garden for 3 or 4 weeks in the summer.

Vanessids This group appears to have been hardest hit by the poor weather last spring and this was reflected in the numbers in my garden in August and September. Small Tortoiseshell (- 47) were low compared with average years, and the Peacock (-42) fared even worse. Red Admiral (+ 70) numbers were lower than average, although it appears to have done well in the south of England. Comma - never very numerous- even fewer this year.

Browns Ringlet (+ 32) and Meadow Brown (+ 1) had a good year and Speckled Wood (+ 12) appeared to do rather better in 2016 than in the previous year – although these observations are made on very little evidence. Gatekeeper (-40) seems to flourish in some areas and to be missing others, but the reason for this is not clear. The Small Heath is limited to a small range of sites in North Leeds, one of which, Golden Acre Park, is becoming less suitable for butterflies as, each year, more wildflowers are lost.

Garden Butterflies (Vanessids) 2013 to 2016

The years are not strictly comparable - with weather and ~~absence on holidays~~ varying from year to year.

Most of the records for 2014 are missing for some reason

Species	Month	2013		2014		2015		2016	
		Days	No	Days	No	Days	No	Days	No
Painted Lady	July					--			
	Aug	2	2					2	2
	Sept							9	10
	Oct							1	1
Red Admiral	July	2	2			5	5	1	1
	Aug	1	1			-		-	
	Sept	4	5			14	33	11	14
	Oct	1	5			15	28	7	13
	Nov					1	1		
Small Tortoiseshell	July	18	42			15	42	5	6
	Aug	9	13			13	29	4	5
	Sept	3	3			12	17	9	17
	Oct	2	2			6	6	3	3
	Nov	1	1						
Peacock	July	3	3	11	41	--		--	
	Aug	18	40	14	23	8	9	--	
	Sept	3	5	2	2	10	10	--	
	Oct					2	2	--	
	Nov					1	1	--	
Comma	July	1	1			1	1	2	2
	Aug	1	1			--			
	Sept	2	2			4	7		
	Oct	1	1			10	12		

Hymenoptera in 2016

Andy Millard writes:

Numbers of bees, particularly Bumble bees (*Bombus* sp.) seemed to be down on 2015. As with butterflies, which also underwent a noticeable decline compared with 2015, the reasons are probably several and difficult to determine. The phenomenon was evident in the case of *B. hypnorum*, which in recent years has been swarming over our *Deutzia*, but this year was doing so to a lesser extent. However, our small bee hotel has achieved an interesting change in occupancy from 2015 when leaf-cutter bees (*Megachile* sp.) nested in 6 holes and the Red Mason bee (*Osmia bicornis*) in one compared with this year when *O. bicornis* nested in 8 holes, *Megachile* in none but the spider-hunting wasp *Dipogon variegatus* (see below) nested in two.

Good numbers of the common solitary wasps *Ectemnius cavifrons* and *Pemphredon lugubris* have continued to nest in our dead *Betula pendula* trunk.

Three visits were made to a nearby disused sandstone quarry, Woodside (SE254384), where, although much vegetation has colonised it over the past two decades or so, there are significant areas of bare ground. In addition to common Bumble bee species, the following solitary bees were recorded here during 2016: *Colletes succinctus* (usually associated with heather, *Calluna vulgaris*, of which there are a few plants scattered round the edge of the quarry), *Halictus tumulorum* and *H. rubicundus*, both of which are widespread in England but the latter also extends up to the Inverness area of Scotland. Two further species of *Halictidae* were recorded when the Leeds Naturalists' Club visited Ledsham Dale on the 10 August, *Lasioglossum calceatum* and *L. smeathmanellum*.

A spider-hunting wasp (Pompilidae), *Dipogon variegatus*, was collected from



Dipogon variegatus, female



Dipogon cell

the side of our neighbour's house on 15 August 2016, where it had been collecting spider web silk and taking it into a crack in the stonework. The silk is used to bind together sand grains, soil particles and fragments of plant material for the formation of cell partitions. On the 23 August it was noticed that a hole in our bee hotel appeared to be sealed by what looked like spider web silk. Later that day a second individual *D. variegatus* female was observed running over our bee hotel (see Fig. 1) and taking spider web silk into another of the holes, which appeared sealed the following day (see Fig. 2). The species has the characteristically long legs of spider-hunting wasps and the distinctive bifasciate wings (possessing two dark bands) of females of the genus *Dipogon*.

This is the first record for the Leeds MBC area, the nearest records outside Leeds being from near Stanley, Wakefield in 1997 and the Baildon area in 2004 and 2006. The species is not particularly common but is widely distributed in England, more local in Wales and with only one recent record in Scotland.

In Britain the prey is thought to be exclusively the Common Crab spider *Xysticus cristatus* (Thomisidae). This species has been recorded in Leeds but not in the vicinity of our bee hotel, although it hasn't been actively looked for. The only spider that has been observed on the bee hotel is the Zebra spider *Salticus scenicus* (Fig.3).

The Field Digger wasp *Mellinus arvensis* has been recorded in parts of Leeds in the past but this particular individual was photographed in Ackworth on 11 August 2016. Its prey items are flies (Diptera), particularly Muscidae (House flies), Syrphidae (Hoverflies) and Tabanidae (Horse flies).



Hoverflies in 2016

The Editor writes

The year started very early on February 22nd with a female *Eristlis tenax* feeding on pansies on Headingley Hill. Ball and Morris say that 'females hibernate in sheltered cavities in caves and buildings'; cavities are plentiful in my house!

Closure of Breary Marsh and other commitments limited my field work thereafter until late June. June 27th was a good day in the garden with 13 species recorded including a male of the migrant *Scaeva pyrastris* which was the first since 2011, 2 or 3 *Cheilosia illustata*, which are rarely seen there, the first ever example of var *bulborum* of *Merodon equestris* which breeds in several of the large plant pots and, best of all, a new species for the garden, *Eumerus funeralis* sitting cooly on the leaves of a large clump of *procosmia* while doubtless its offspring were chewing away at the roots. This was the 50th species of hoverfly for the garden.

Some fine specimens of the soldier fly *Chloromia Formosa* were also around.

Hoverflies were present in reasonable numbers thereafter on Headingley Hill and in mid-November several *Helophilus pendulus*

Hoverflies (continued)



Merodon equestris var *bulborum*



Eumeris funeralis

were still holding territory on the pond and the larger *Eristalis* species feeding on available flowers.

A stand of Knapweed at Golden Acre on 1st September held large numbers of *Eristalis arbustorum* as well as 8 or 9 other species.

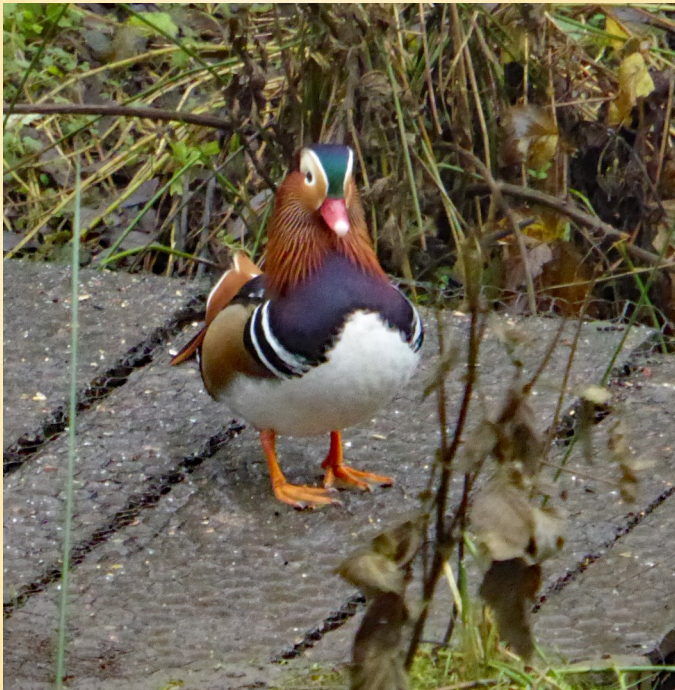


Eristalis arbustorum

Bird Report

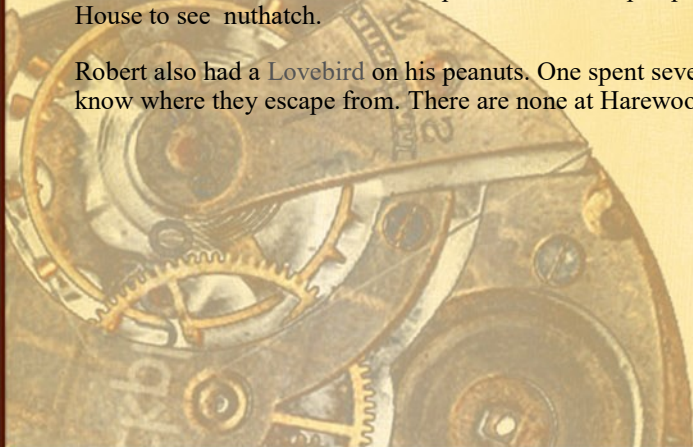
The very mild winter—Song thrush and Hedge sparrow were in full song by early December and Collared dove ‘singing’ before Christmas - has meant that few of the normal winter migrants have arrived and the berry crop in Leeds has been largely unexploited. There were only 2 Redwings on Woodhouse Moor on 27th December instead of the normal 1-300. Andy Millard saw 2 or 3 Waxwings in Horsforth in early December but they don’t seem to have hung around. Similarly with the Bramblings on the feeders at Adel Dam. The only things I found on the feeders were Mandarin ducks, part of the 8 pairs that have been displaying on the small pond in front of the Marsh Hide.

A flock of about 50 Siskins with Goldfinches arrived at Batty’s Wood on Meanwood Ridge in Mid December and has remained there.



Perhaps the most interesting news of the season is that Robert Keeble has had a Nuthatch on his feeder at the Quaker Meeting House. I thought that they got no further into the City than the Meanwood Ridge and never recorded one in over thirty years crossing Woodhouse Moor. But Peter Larner has put an historical perspective on matter. In the 1950s you had to go to the grounds of Harewood House to see nuthatch.

Robert also had a Lovebird on his peanuts. One spent several weeks feeding on exotic berries on Meanwood Ridge in 2014. I don’t know where they escape from. There are none at Harewood but I think there is a captive population at Lotherton Hall.



Syllabus 2017

Indoor Meetings (7.00 pm Quaker Meeting House, Woodhouse Lane)

January 9	John Bowers	Wildlife of the Lesbos Mountains
February 13	Dave Johnston	North American Wildlife
March 13	Francis Hickenbottom	The Wakefield Peregrine Project
April 10	Peter Larnar	Wildlife in a Cookridge Garden
Sept 11	Mike Denton	Bird ringing in The Gambia
October 9	Gavin Boyd	Introduction to <i>Diptera</i>
November 13	Peter & Barbara Murphy	A Year in the Life of Rodley Nature Reserve
December 11		AGM and Conversazione

Field Meetings 2017 To be Arranged

Leeds Naturalists Club and Scientific Association

Annual membership fee £10.00

Applications to the Membership Secretary, Dr A Millard, Woodland Villas, 86, Bachelor Lane, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 5NF. Tel: 0113 258 2482

Feedback and questions to John Bowers: johnbowers1081@gmail.com