



The Leeds Naturalist 2018

Since summer 2012 John Bowers has done a splendid job in compiling two newsletters a year for Leeds Naturalists' Club, covering field meetings, other field observations and any further points of interest regarding natural history in the Leeds area. Unfortunately, due to ill health, he has been unable to continue with providing this valuable public record of Leeds Naturalists' Club activities. He'll be a very difficult act to follow but this is an attempt to keep the production of a newsletter going, although, to start with, it'll be on an annual basis. I'm very grateful to those members, including John, who have submitted material for this edition. Gavin Boyd deserves special mention for submitting many records from the field trips. It is intended to post the full species' lists for the Club field trips on the website. Comments on this edition and contributions for future newsletters should be emailed to leedsnats@gmail.com or posted to 86 Bachelor Lane, Leeds LS18 5NF.

Andy Millard

The Weather from April to September 2018

I have regularly taken readings of temperature, rainfall and barometer in the garden on Alwoodley Ridge, near the Buck Stone aka the Buckstone, at about 08:30 every day. Situated at about 137m above sea level and south facing the wind whistles along the valley predominantly from east to west.

The highest temperature I recorded was 21°C on the 23rd of July and the lowest was the 1st of April at only 2°C before heavy snow overnight. The 3rd of April had the lowest barometric reading of 995mb, whilst 25th September reached a dizzy 1039mb.

The main concern however was the lack of rain for much of the time over these months. After the snow of early April with 38mm (1.5 inches [the imperial scale is larger print]) precipitation recorded on the 3rd of April, there was a period between 24th of April and 28th July when there was no measurable amount of rain. On 29th July there was a thunderstorm with 28mm (1.1 inches) falling, followed by 2.5mm (0.1 inches) & 5.6mm (0.22 inches) on the 30th and 31st July respectively before two weeks of drought with gale force winds, until 14th of August with 14mm (0.55 inches) again followed by drought to be broken the weekend of the 27th of August with 11mm (0.45 inches) of rain – Bank Holiday Weekend!

Since then there have been more regular readings of rainfall and the barometer has climbed again to reach the highest in late September.

The combination of high winds with drought will have increased transpiration for plants possibly causing wilting and death; equally seed germination may have been reduced. Falling numbers of water sources will have had an impact on wildlife. It will be interesting to see the Recorders' reports and see how the dry weather has impacted on the flora and fauna observations and hence populations.

Peter Birdsall

Headingley Hill Report for 2018

Birds

The winter 2017/18 did not produce the expected numbers of Redwings. The normal pattern has been for the birds to arrive in the late autumn to feed on the abundant berry resources to be found in the area, not only on Headingley Hill, but also on Woodhouse Ridge and the streets of the Lower Meanwood valley. As these resources were consumed the birds would typically move into the town and at Christmas could be found exploiting the ornamental cherries and other exotics around Woodhouse Square and the LGI where they were joined by migrant Blackbirds, scattered wintering Blackcaps and, in good years, Waxwings. In the new year a large flock of 2-300 Redwings would inhabit Woodhouse Moor, feeding on the wet grassland. They would be found roosting during the day on the trees crossing the Moor. In March or early April, before departure, a twittering sub-song was continuous with the occasional burst of full song.

This last winter none of this happened. The Redwings did not come in the autumn and the berries for the most part fell to the ground or rotted on the trees. The first, and only, Redwings on Woodhouse Moor were on 17th February when c.100 appeared, departing on the following day.

The other usual winter feature is a flock of Siskins often found in the solitary larch. No more than the odd bird was seen in the early months but > 20 are present now in mid-November.

Swifts have bred on the north face of the nearest house in Ashwood Terrace every year since at least the early 1970s. They did not come this year and very few birds were seen at any point in the summer. Equally the Blackcap that normally breeds in or around the garden put in only desultory appearances. On a positive note, Stock doves have taken over a large pollarded Sycamore in the Ashwoods and the Nuthatches that excavate nest-holes in the cement

below the wooden gutter of the house bred again and fledged at least two young. A female Goosander in a neighbour's pond was disturbed by an aircraft on 9 June where it was presumably hoping to catch one of her two goldfish.

Lepidoptera

The first butterfly was Holly blue on 27 April then Speckled wood, Comma, Green-veined white and Orange tip on 2 May. Holly blues had an excellent year. There were up to 10 on 5 May and were common throughout June and July with c.40 on 27 July. Male Brimstones were seen on three occasions but no females and, whatever was eating the Alder buckthorns planted in the hedges, it was not they. It was a good season for whites. Green-veined and Large were abundant with fewer Small whites (ratio of 3: 2: 0.5).



White-letter Hairstreak. Photo. J.Bowers

But the biggest surprise was on 10 July when a White-letter hairstreak was feeding for most of the day. It stayed for several days and at some time was joined by another. The last record for this site was in Sutton and Beaumont (*Butterflies & Moths of Yorkshire*, 1989) for 1986 when a small colony was found in a Wych elm in an adjacent garden. That tree rapidly succumbed to Dutch elm disease.

Despite the heat it was not a good year for Vanessids. Only one Small tortoiseshell and one Painted lady, the latter an aberrant and causing some excitement as it looked like an American painted lady. Odd Red admirals were seen in autumn with the last on 22 October. Only one Ringlet seen but the colony on Cardboard Hill seems to have been wiped out by excessive grass cutting. Speckled wood and Meadow brown are now well established in the garden.

The moth trap was run in June and July but was thereafter abandoned since catches were mostly in single figures while wasp catches were moving towards three figures! The only species of note was an Oak-tree pug. The Uncertain was the commonest species. A Hummingbird hawk visited briefly on 23 May.



Svenssons Copper Underwing from Headingley Hill moth trap. Photo J.Bowers

Dragonflies

There were three records for this year:

29/6 female/teneral *Libellula depressa*. First record for the site.

19/7 teneral male *Sympetrum striolatum*

29/7 teneral male *Aeshna cyanea*

The two latter may have emerged from the larger pond.



Female/teneral *Libellula depressa*. Photo. J.Bowers

Hoverflies

Helophilus pendulus only occurred in small numbers but over a long season. There was no massive influx of *Episyrphus balteatus* and one record only of each of *Eristalis trivittatus*, *Volucella insignis*, *V. pellucens* and *Xylota segnis*.



Leucozona lucorum. Photo J.Bowers.

There were strong numbers of *E. tenax* and *E. pertinax* in September/October. Three new species were recorded for the site: *Epistrophe nitidicola* on 13 April; *Leucozona lucorum* on 11 June and *Sericomyia silentis* on 18 June.

Hymenoptera

Bumblebees were much as normal except that *Bombus lucorum* had a very good year. Over two weeks in late spring the garden hosted good numbers of *Nomada flava*:



♀ *Nomada flava*. Photo J.Bowers

Away from Headingley Hill, other records included the hoverflies *Portevinia maculata* (14 May) on wild garlic on Woodhouse Ridge, *Criorhina floccosa* (27 May) on the base of an oak in Breary Marsh and *Leucozona lucorum* (4 June) in St.Chads Churchyard respectively. Also in St.Chads on the same day, there were masses of the froghopper bug *Cercopsis vulnerata*.



Cercopsis vulnerata. Photo J.Bowers

On 24 September a queen Hornet (*Vespa crabro*) was seen just north of the greenhouses at Golden Acre park.

John Bowers

Field Trip: Gledhow Valley Meadow – 2nd May



Probably *Coleotes atropos* (Photo A.Millard)

The visit took place earlier in the season compared with 2017. The usual relatively common woodland/urban garden birds were heard (e.g. Chiffchaff, Song Thrush) and two species of ground beetle were recorded (*Loricera pilicornis* and *Pterostichus madidus*), along with the Orange Ladybird (*Halyzia sedecimguttata*), the larvae of which feed on fungal hyphae and are associated with woodland, particularly Sycamore trees. A spider likely to be *Coleotes atropos* was also found. This species constructs a silk-lined burrow beneath rocks and logs in woodland and has a distribution mainly in the west, particularly Wales and the North West of England.

Andy Millard

Field Trip: St. Aidans, Swillington – 12th June

The meeting was attended by 8 members and, as we entered the reserve from the southern side via Fleet Lane, most of the observations were made from the south western area of the reserve. Birds one might expect to note were recorded, including Common Tern, warblers such as Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler; also Bullfinch and Skylark. It was also pleasing to hear the boom of the Bittern and one was seen in flight being mobbed by gulls.



Female spotted crane fly *Nephrostoma* sp. at St. Aidans. Photo C.Rew

For the most part the insects seen were common and relatively widespread. Butterflies included: Common Blue, Large Skipper, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood; Dragonflies: Banded Demoiselle, Azure damselfly, Blue-tailed damselfly, Common Blue damselfly; Bumblebees: *Bombus agrorum*, *B. hypnorum*, and *B. pascuorum*). It was pleasing to record 7-Spot ladybird at a time when the Harlequin Ladybird is all too often the commonest one we encounter. The plume moth *Gillmeria pallidactyla* was also recorded.

Plume Moth *Gillmeria pallidactyla* Photo C.Rew

However, there were two insect species worthy of more detailed consideration. *Agelastica alni* (Alder Leaf beetle) is a fairly large, shiny, blue beetle which has only recently arrived in Yorkshire. Twenty-five years ago it was thought to be extinct in the UK, not having been seen since 1900, although later it was discovered it had been recorded in the south of England in the 1940s and 1950s. Then in 2004 larvae and adults were collected in Manchester, followed by records elsewhere in the north of England, including SW Yorkshire in 2010. It has been recorded from at least ten sites in VC63, including Blackmoorfoot Reservoir and Gavin's garden in Huddersfield. There was very little Alder growing on the parts of the reserve visited but the small patch encountered had been visibly damaged by the feeding adults and larvae, and specimens were easily found.

Alder Leaf Beetle *Agelastica alni*. Photo C.Rew

The other interesting insect record was the hoverfly *Eristalis abusivus*, one of the smaller *Eristalis* spp., which is very similar superficially to *E. arbustorum*, *E. horticola* and *E. nemorum*. Its distribution, however, is largely coastal, particularly on the west coasts of England, Scotland and Wales, although a good scattering of inland records also exist.

Female *Eristalis abusivus*. Photo C. Rew

Andy Millard

Field Trip: Ledston Luck – 3rd July

Eight members attended the meeting. The effects of the long, hot, dry summer were particularly apparent where most of the vegetation was brown, in contrast to the definitely lush vegetation seen at about the same time last year! Birds noted included Yellowhammer, Buzzard, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Green Woodpecker. Pollinating insects seemed to be smaller in number compared with last year, probably because of the lack of plants in flower e.g. the only bees noted were the bumblebees Common Carder, *Bombus pascuorum*, Red-tailed *B. lapidarius* and the Honey bee (*Apis mellifera*). Lepidoptera included the butterflies Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*), Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), Small White (*Pieris rapae*), Green-veined White (*P. napi*), Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) and Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*) together with the moths 6-spot Burnet (*Zygaena filipendula*) and the Shaded Broad Bar (*Scotopteryx chenopodiata*).

6-spot Burnet moth *Zygaena filipendula*. Photo by C.Rew

Dragonflies were less in evidence than last year but we did see Blue-tailed damselfly, Common Blue damselfly, Common Darter and 4-spotted Chaser. Alder Leaf beetle was also found again.

Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*. Photo C.Rew.

Andy Millard



Early grazing at Ledsham Dale. Photo P.Larner

Field Trip: Washburn Valley – 10th July

Only two members attended, Phyl Abbott and myself. The draw-down zone at the northern end of Lindley Wood Reservoir was our main interest. The water was very low, given the very dry conditions through June & into July, so the exposed area was very extensive, with considerable vegetation cover & a relatively modest stream running through the channel south towards the main part of the reservoir. There were two plants seen that were not on the existing plant list for this site - *Equisetum sylvaticum* (Wood Horsetail) & *Spergularia rubra* (Sand Spurrey), the former growing near the permanent path but the latter, an annual or biennial, growing very close to the edge of the stream. The annual *Bidens tripartita* (Trifid Bur-marigold), apparently declining nationally, was plentiful on the exposed mud. It was accompanied by various grasses including *Alopecurus geniculatus* (Marsh Foxtail) & sedges & also plentiful *Stachys palustris* (Marsh Woundwort) with its beautiful large orchid-like flowers. The *Persicaria amphibia* (Amphibious Bistort) was heavily infested with galls of the Cecidomyiid gall-midge *Wachtliella persicariae*.

This area is clearly a very dynamic site, being regularly inundated in winter but putting on a good show of annuals & other opportunist species each spring as the waters recede. In this way, it is a refuge for these species & hopefully one that will continue indefinitely. There is every hope this will be the case, given the importance of the Washburn Valley & its reservoirs to the water supply of the big conurbations further south.

Graham Heffernan

Field Trip: Ledsham Dale – 12th August

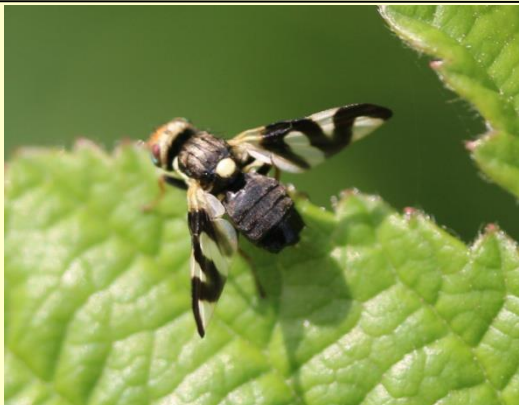
Seven members attended on a warm, sunny day. As with the other field visits the impact of the summer weather on the vegetation was only too obvious with much in the way of shades of fawn/brown. In addition, cattle were present on the reserve earlier than they should be, presumably because the farmer's own grazing had been exhausted.

Despite the general state of the vegetation, flowering Restharrow (*Ononis repens*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) and Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*) provided some respite for the limited number of pollinators around. Areas of Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*) and Salad Burnett (*Poterium sanguisorba*) were also noted but Creeping Lady's Tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) was not found. Bird life was thin on the ground apart from the usual woodland/garden birds and the sounds of buzzards in the vicinity.

The butterflies noted were Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Small White, Holly Blue and Comma. A passing walker did say that he had seen Brown Argus towards the north of the reserve. Moth species seen were the Silver-Y (*Autographa gamma*) and Straw Dot (*Rivula sericealis*), together with two micromoths, the Common Grass Veneer *Agriphila tristella* and the Pale Straw Pearl *Udea lutealis*.

Gall on Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) caused by Tephritid fly *Urophora cardui*. Photo C.Rew

We did find a gall on Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), which is caused by the Tephritid fly *Urophora cardui*. The fly itself (see image overleaf) wasn't seen, which is a shame as it has very striking dark markings on its wings.



Urophora cardui. Photo by Nick Goodrum, available under the Creative Commons Attribution Licence & accessible at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nrgoodrum/28517345635/in/photolist-UryH2R-QmX79j-nuy3cb-EFi8te-agedz4-ANCQJm-KrYRk2>

The species is relatively new to Yorkshire and like many other insects has been expanding its range northwards from the Midlands and Southern England during the past 15 years or so. Another insect of some interest was the large snail-eating ground beetle *Cychrus caraboides* which was found under a log on which Gavin and Colin ate their lunch!



Beech mast in Adel Churchyard, reflecting a good year for it. Photo P.Larner

An Obstinate Sparrowhawk!

I have regular visits by Sparrowhawks in my garden and they like to rest in the shrubbery between my neighbour's garden and my own, and perch on my pergola which holds nine different feeders (peanuts, shucked sunflower seed, niger seed and kitchen scraps). These last few weeks I have had both juvenile (this year's birds) male and female Sparrowhawks visiting regularly, doubtless trying to catch the tits, finches and a prized Nuthatch on the feeders. Yesterday (20 September) a stunning male rested on the pergola for over fifteen minutes, affording splendid

views to myself and a friend. His colouring was a muted version of an adult male but the orange stripes on his breast and the blue-grey back were clearly seen. He was only about fifteen metres from my eyes. Eventually a Jay appeared and buzzed the male but he still did not move, as in the pouring rain he had only one foot on the perch, the other being tucked into his breast feathers. Undeterred the Jay tried again and actually knocked the Sparrowhawk off the top of the pergola. I wish I had filmed it! They both peeled away and went into the copse behind my house. Fantastic!

Shirley Carson

Visitors to a Horsforth garden in 2018

While focusing mainly on the aculeate visitors to our garden, other occasional visitors have caught our attention.



Grey Heron. Photo: A. Millard

A year or so after digging our current pond (only about 11m² in area) it was visited by a Grey Heron for about a week to feed on frogs. This April, 12 years later, another Heron turned up (pictured above) with the same dietary requirements. The mental image of frog limbs sticking out from either side of its beak is a very vivid one!



Fox. Photo: A. Millard

During this summer our relatively sheltered garden has provided an ideal place for an afternoon snooze (above) on several occasions.

Andy Millard