

DORNEY NATURE DIARY (1)

NARRATIVE EXTRACTS MASTER, 1961–2026

The human voice of each columnist, in chronological order — companion to the Species & Habitat Data Record

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Building on the work of Peter Tyler (1935–2022)

A living reference document · Compiled 29 May 2026

How to use this record. This is a reference work, not a document to read end to end. It is arranged by year, then by month within each year, so the quickest way in is to go straight to the period you want — or to search (Ctrl+F) for a species, place, or person. Each year opens with a short note on who was writing and any gaps in the archive.

Contents

1961 Naturalist (Mrs Toms) — the founding columns	4
1962 Naturalist (Mrs Toms) Jan–Aug; Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) Sep–Dec	5
1964 Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) — full year	7
1965 Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) — April and June only recorded	9
1966 Wayfarer (Peter Tyler)	10
1967 Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) — final year; departs November 1968	11
1968 Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) to November, then Brock (David Shott) from December	13
1969 Brock (David Shott)	14
1970 Brock (David Shott)	15
1971 Brock (David Shott)	16
1972 Brock (David Shott)	17
1973 Brock (David Shott)	17
1974 Brock (David Shott)	18
1975 Brock (David Shott)	20
1976 Brock (David Shott)	21
1977 Brock (David Shott)	23
1978 Brock (David Shott)	24
1979 Brock (David Shott) — Final Year	26
1980–1981 No nature column	27
1982 Lois Parker — Evins Nature Competition Essay	27
1983 Lois Parker — Evins Nature Competition Poem	27
1984 No nature column	28
1985 Lois Parker — First Regular Columns (Nov & Dec)	28
1986 Lois Parker — First Full Year	28
1987 Lois Parker — includes Great Storm of October 1987	30
1988 Lois Parker + David Paxton (one column)	31
1989 Lois Parker	32
1990 Lois Parker	34
1991 Lois Parker	35
1992 Lois Parker	36
1993 Lois Parker	38
1994 Lois Parker	40
1995 Lois Parker	42
1996 Lois Parker	43
1997 Lois Parker	45
1998 Lois Parker — 12th anniversary tribute	47
1999 Lois Parker	49
2000 Lois Parker — Final Year	52
2001 Lois Parker died 25 February 2001	54
2002 No nature column — incidental record	55
2003 No nature column — incidental record	55
2004 Patricia Powell — ‘Lake Lines’ wildlife content	55
2005 Patricia Powell and contributors — wildlife records	56
2006 No nature column — no significant wildlife content	57
2007 Tony Dixon-Smith — regular wildlife letters	57
2008 No nature column — no significant wildlife content	59
2009 Tony Dixon-Smith — ‘NATURE NOTES +’ columns begin	59
2010 Tony Dixon-Smith — ‘NATURE +’ columns	59
2011 Tony Dixon-Smith — ‘NATURE +’ columns (early)	61

2012 Tony Dixon-Smith — ‘NATURE +’ columns (OCR'd from scanned PDF).....	62
2013 Tony Dixon-Smith — column continues (hospitalised one month).....	64
2014 Tony Dixon-Smith — column continues	64
2015 FILE MISSING	64
2016 Tony Dixon-Smith — column continues	64
2017 Tony Dixon-Smith + Kristina Perkins.....	64
2018 ‘Something New’ group — wild flower initiative	65
2019 ‘Wayfarer’ — new Nature Notes column; bird records	65
2020 ‘Wayfarer’ — Nature Notes column (7 articles)	67
2021 No dedicated nature column — incidental records	69
2022 Thames Water rewilding; Peter Tyler obituary; garden wildlife	69
2023 Andrew Oliver — Nature Notes column begins; Peter Tyler legacy.....	70
2024 Andrew Oliver — formal Nature Notes column throughout the year	72
2025 Andrew Oliver — ‘Wild Dorney’ Nature Notes column (intermittent).....	74
2026 Andrew Oliver — ‘Wild Dorney’ Nature Notes column	76

1961 | Naturalist (Mrs Toms) — the founding columns

The earliest surviving Nature Notes. The 'Naturalist' column begins in the autumn of 1961; the byline is 'Naturalist', attributed to Mrs Toms (who continues into 1962). These four issues — September to December — are the first entries in the parish's continuous nature record. The October column was held over ("Naturalist" is on holiday so this popular feature is held over till next month'), which confirms the feature was already established and well-received by autumn 1961.

September 1961 — Naturalist

On garden escapes that have naturalised in the wild locally, Mrs Toms describes two balsams. The Orange Balsam or Jewel-weed, introduced to Surrey and first noticed in the wild by the River Mole in 1822, has since spread to many rivers including the Thames, where several plants grow along the Dorney stretch of the towpath — several feet high, right at the water's edge, with hooded, lipped and spurred brilliant-orange flowers with a spotted lip. The Himalayan Balsam, a more recent and still-spreading arrival (abundant in the Exe Valley in Devon and in industrial canals), she had only that summer realised grew near Dorney: a twenty-yard stretch of ditch beside Huntercombe Lane filled with this tall, thick-stemmed, purplish-pink plant — 'Policeman's Helmet'. She notes the explosive seed dispersal of all balsams: the little crack of the explosion, audible when the road is quiet, followed by the patter of seeds on the surrounding leaves.

October 1961 — Naturalist

No column: *"Naturalist" is on holiday so this popular feature is held over till next month.* (Recorded here because it confirms the column's standing in 1961.)

November 1961 — Naturalist

The Lapwing — also Green Plover or Peewit — a typical farmland bird of open arable and pasture. Though present all year, its numbers on Dorney Common are now augmented by migrants from further north and the Continent; the birds stand about the Common in well-spaced individual 'territories', so thinly and evenly scattered that a casual glance suggests only half a dozen where many more are present. Accustomed to traffic so long as it does not stop, they can be watched closely from a slow-moving car or bicycle — elegant, black-and-white, with a faint green sheen over the dark grey back and a pert upturned crest. Mrs Toms recalls that about ten years earlier (c. 1951) there were fears the Lapwing was declining through increased grass-cutting for silage disturbing breeding, but numbers have since recovered; a series of hard winters is now thought to have been the real cause of the temporary decline. She closes with the cheerful winter sight of Lapwings sheltering in a hollow, cart-rut or the lee of a grass tussock on the bitter Common.

December 1961 — Naturalist

The tits: of the eight British species, four are common in the parish. Great Tit and Blue Tit are familiar garden and bird-table visitors and the chief culprits in the milk-bottle-opening habit — first reported from Southampton in 1921 and since spread nationwide; Mrs Toms once watched a pair of Blue Tits flit confidently into the Barge Farm milk float parked halfway down Harcourt Road, and feared for the havoc their sharp beaks might wreak before the roundsman returned. The Coal Tit is also present — small, black-headed, grey-bodied, with a conspicuous white nape patch; it favours conifers and is common in the new forestry plantations, but needs only a few garden firs, so Dorney and Dorney Reach gardens with planted trees support a few (a pair had been visiting her bird table for some weeks). The Long-tailed Tit comes to bird tables only rarely; she has met it mainly as a whole family of ten or twelve passing through the garden or along a

hedgerow, uttering little contact cries to keep the stragglers together, buff and black and white and — with their over-long tails — looking ‘scarcely airworthy’.

1962 | Naturalist (Mrs Toms) Jan–Aug; Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) Sep–Dec

Note: 1963 is entirely missing from the archive.

January — Naturalist

Early-growing plants observed along Marsh Lane hedgerow base in January despite frost. Jack-by-the-Hedge (Garlic Mustard) standing in platoons along the hedgerows, already showing leaves. Lords and Ladies also showing early leaf growth — and notably the spotted form (*Arum maculatum*) is becoming rarer, with the unspotted form now predominant. The columnist notes this is a reversal of the situation twenty or thirty years prior, and wonders whether botanists may one day need to change the Latin name to reflect it. Coltsfoot also already appearing, its flowering spikes preceding the leaves, found on dry artificial sites such as gravel heaps and wall bases.

February — Naturalist

Cold-weather observations from the garden bird table. Two pairs of Bullfinches visited but were too shy to feed; one female found dead beneath a fir tree shortly after the cold spell ended, presumed to have roosted there and perished in the night frost. The columnist handled the bird and gave a careful description of its plumage — black and grey with pearl-grey breast ‘faintly suffused with the pink colour which in the cock becomes such a warm rose red’, and the diagnostic white rump. A Mistle Thrush also visited the bird table — described as unusual behaviour — enabling a direct side-by-side comparison with a Song Thrush: notably larger, greyer, larger more defined spots, and white tips to outer tail feathers identified as the key field mark in flight.

March — Naturalist

Lesser Celandine in profuse bloom at Climo’s Corner, described as heralding spring. The columnist reflects on the plant’s early emergence as a seasonal marker.

May — Naturalist

Exploration of the relationship between birdsong and territory — male birds sing to establish and defend territory, not merely for aesthetic pleasure. A thoughtful ecological note on bird behaviour.

June — Naturalist

Arrival and spread of two foreign ‘weeds’ now establishing in the local area: Oxford Ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*), which colonised bombed urban sites after WWII and spread along railway lines into the countryside; and Canadian Fleabane (*Erigeron canadensis*), another recent colonist. Both are noted with mild alarm as newcomers to the parish flora.

July — Naturalist

Two subjects: the Prickly Lettuce or Compass Plant (*Lactuca serriola*), so called because its leaves align north-south to minimise direct sun exposure — found locally. Also Shags (the columnist uses the term for what appear to be Great Cormorants) observed fishing at Bray Lock, described as an unusual inland sighting worth recording.

August — Naturalist

The final column by Mrs Toms before her move to Leamington Spa. A remarkable personal record: she has kept a seventeen-year log of bird species seen in her garden, reaching a total of sixty-one species. This baseline garden bird list, compiled 1945-1962, is a significant historical record though individual species are not itemised in the column.

September — Wayfarer (Peter Tyler's first column)

Opening observation: the departure of swallows as 'a clear indication that the summer is nearly over' — invariably the first migrants to leave. Resident birds such as Starlings, Thrushes and Sparrows described as looking 'far from their best', ragged after the breeding season, young already in adult plumage. Robin beginning to show his red breast; cock Pheasant in 'magnificent plumage'. Wild fruits ripening well — Crab-apple, Dog-rose, Elderberry, Hawthorn all bearing well. Notes the old country saying that a heavy berry crop predicts a hard winter. Wasps attacking ripe plums and pears in gardens, but defended as 'extremely beneficial insects' for their consumption of insect pests. Autumn leaf colour beginning — notes that the previous autumn was the first for three years where weather permitted the full display.

October — Wayfarer

A detailed introduction to fungi prompted by October walks. Their enormous variation is described — from familiar mushrooms and toadstools to microscopic moulds, mildews, yeasts and rusts. Unlike green plants, fungi have no chlorophyll and must extract food from living or dead organic material. The Field Mushroom described as sometimes found 'in great profusion on rich pasture', its fairy rings explained as concentric bands of different-coloured grass above the growing mycelium — 'some fairy rings are known to be over four centuries old.' Four poisonous species named: Devil's Boletus, Destroying Angel, Fool's Mushroom and Death Cap. Edible species noted: Oyster Mushroom, Beef-Steak Fungus, Horn of Plenty.

November — Wayfarer

An ecological survey of inland gulls, which the columnist notes are now year-round visitors rather than storm-driven occasional visitors. The old saying that inland gulls foretell rough weather at sea is described as 'not strictly accurate anymore'. Large numbers roosting on Staines Reservoirs — up to one hundred thousand birds in bad January weather — commuting daily outwards to feed in surrounding districts including Dorney's fields and river. Flocks of several hundred observed flying in V-formation toward Staines at dusk. Five species likely: Great Black-Back, Lesser Black-Back, Black-Headed, Common and Herring Gull — Black-Headed described as probably the commonest locally, its black head absent in winter plumage making identification tricky.

December — Wayfarer

A fox found lying on the Bath Road verge at Taplow, apparently uninjured, collected and examined. Male dog fox, probably in his second year, described in detail: 'rich reddish-brown colour intermixed with black, white and grey', remarkably bushy brush, over three feet nose-to-tail, standing some twelve inches high. Foxes described as 'by no means uncommon in the Parish', using small thickets and copses for cover, sheltering in 'earths' tunnelled under tree roots or bramble patches. Does not hibernate — active in winter, especially 'near poultry at Christmas!' Track pattern in snow described: fox leaves prints in a single line (stealthy walk) versus dog's double line (trotting).

1964 | Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) — full year

Note: 1963 entirely missing from archive. Months not listed below (e.g. May, Jul) are recorded in contributor list but full text not yet retrieved.

January — Wayfarer

Mistletoe as the focus — its curious life history and pagan origins. Can grow wild on lime, poplar, hawthorn, ash or birch; cultivated on apple, pear or plum — apple described as the most satisfactory host. Cultivation technique described in detail: an incision in the underside of a three-year-old apple branch, sticky ripe berries inserted in February, bound with raffia, growth exceedingly slow for five years before a sizeable bunch can be harvested. Notes that mistletoe will weaken or kill its host tree if allowed to grow freely — refuting the country belief that it improves the apple crop.

February — Wayfarer

Dorney Common described as 'a desolate place in winter', devoid of shelter, few animals choosing to live there. Exception: the Lapwing or Peewit — flocks of twenty to thirty counted along the roadside, remarkably tolerant of passing motor traffic though wary of pedestrians. Nesting likely on the Common: nest merely a heap of dead grass in the open; four eggs; hatch in as little as two weeks; young run well within two or three days. The female's distraction display described: 'feigning an injured wing so as to decoy would-be enemies away from the nest.'

March — Wayfarer

Death-watch Beetle (*Xestobium rufovillosum*) as the main subject, prompted by woodworm found in pews at St James's church. The beetle's life cycle described in detail: eggs laid on wood surface, grubs burrow in and live for three or more years eating the wood from within — damage invisible externally until powdered wood deposits appear, often too late. 'Occasionally damaged beams have been discovered only when a roof shows signs of collapse.' The ticking sound explained — the beetle striking its head on wood, origin of haunted-house sounds. The Furniture Beetle (common woodworm) mentioned as a related species; treatment with proprietary liquids at intervals described as effective.

April/May — Wayfarer

Note: The contributor list records this as 'April 1964' but the original DPN PDF cover confirms it appeared in No. 5, May 1964. The visit to the sett was evidently made in early spring (April) and written up for the May issue.

Badgers as the main subject — a first-hand account of visiting a local badger sett for the first time that year. The columnist first saw 'Brock sitting upon his haunches peering straight at me' before the animal turned and shuffled back into its burrow. The sett has about ten entrances and is 'doubtless inhabited by more than one family of badgers'; fox cubs have also been seen close by, suggesting the sett is partially shared with foxes. The sett is described as only 'a few hundred yards from houses' — the columnist is surprised the badgers are thriving so close to habitation. A key habitat note: the sett occupies 'a small area which is slightly higher than the surrounding land' — described as 'one of the few places around Dorney where it is possible to excavate ten or so feet below ground without the risk of being flooded out in winter.' This is a significant observation about the waterlogged nature of the parish. Signs of spring activity: freshly moved soil, old bedding of bracken and grass turned out and dragged from entrance holes, to be replaced with dry grasses for the breeding season. 'Badgers are fastidious animals devoting much time and energy into keeping both themselves and their homes clean.' Detailed

description of diet: roots, fruits, slugs, snails, wireworms, wasp grubs, beetles, even moles, rabbits and young birds. Remains of meals neatly buried near the sett. Claws cleaned on nearby trees — shredded bark a reliable field sign. 'Man (especially when young) is the badger's only enemy, but I hope the local badgers are allowed to remain undisturbed for many years to come.'

June — Wayfarer

Nettles — prompted by 'some considerable discomfort during the removal of a patch from my garden.' A detailed survey of the nettle's value: leaves infused for nettle tea and beer; young tops boiled as a vegetable; included in cattle and poultry food for iron, sodium and protein. Leaves a source of chlorophyll; stems yield tough fibre used historically for nettle-flax and household linen. Three species of true nettle described: the common Stinging Nettle, the Roman Nettle ('rather scarce, but particularly violent in its sting'), and the small Annual Nettle. Dead-nettles distinguished as a different family. The Small Tortoiseshell butterfly identified as using nettles as its food plant — 'orangey-brown in colour with blue borders to the wings, frequently seen on flowers in June and September.'

July — Wayfarer

Aphids (Greenfly and Blackfly) as 'probably the most important' insect pests of the garden season. Their reproductive rate described as 'fantastic' — eggs overwintering in plant-stem crevices hatch in spring and give rise to millions within weeks; some developing wings to colonise new plants. Feeding mechanism explained: sap extracted like a mosquito bite, much exuded as honeydew which ants collect — 'some ants will even keep aphids in their nests for this purpose.' Large aphid numbers can extract so much sap that plants wilt; risk of fungal and bacterial entry through puncture holes. Natural control by ladybirds and predatory insects noted; warning that DDT and malathion kill ladybirds as readily as aphids; newer systemic insecticides described as selective. Warning: 'insecticides should never be used on plants in flower, for risk of killing bees.'

August — Wayfarer

Bats observed at dusk making regular circuits of the house — exact identification not possible in flight, but assumed to be Pipistrelle or Common Bat 'the species which far outnumbers all others.' The Pipistrelle's roosting habits: large colonies in church roofs, towers, barns, hollow trees and old houses; noisier in newer houses behind tile cladding. The wing membrane described — stretching between long fingers; eyes small, sight poor; hearing for high-pitched vibrations 'extremely well developed', functioning as 'a sort of simple radar' enabling obstacle avoidance and insect capture. Young born this month — one per female, clinging to mother for first two weeks, then hung beside her in the roost 'upside down.'

September — Wayfarer

Common Teasel now 'well established on the banks of the motorway near the river' — stout prickly stems reaching five or six feet, large bristly heads of lilac flowers. The massing of small flowers into compact heads explained as making them more conspicuous to insects. Detailed account of the Teasel's water-collecting mechanism: leaves growing in opposite pairs, their bases joined to form cups holding 'two or three egg-cupfuls of water' — described as 'moats' against creeping insects trying to reach the nectar from below. Evidence discussed that the plant may exude some of its own water into the cups, not relying solely on rain and dew. Distinction drawn between the common wild Teasel (no hooked awns, useless for cloth-finishing) and the Fuller's Teasel (hooked awns, cultivated for the cloth trade, not truly wild in Britain).

October — Wayfarer

Hop (*Humulus lupulus*) discovered in the hedgerows along Marsh Lane — recently become ‘very noticeable’, tending to dominate other hedgerow shrubs with its twining stems. Particularly striking growth up the supporting wires of an electricity pole (twenty-five feet) and a lamp-post. Commercial hop growth rate noted: ‘six inches or more in twenty-four hours under favourable conditions.’ Male and female flowers on separate plants — male flowers small, producing wind-borne pollen; female flowers ‘resembling clusters of yellowish green fir cones, papery to the touch’, containing the essential oils and resins responsible for the bitter taste used in brewing and medicine.

November — Wayfarer

Red Squirrel ‘has completely disappeared from this area during the past thirty years’, having been ousted by the Grey Squirrel — ‘a destructive and aggressive species lacking the playful habits of its red cousin.’ Grey Squirrels introduced from North America around the turn of the century; the first immigrants known to have been released at Cliveden and Farnham Royal ‘probably to adorn large gardens.’ Now a pest and enemy of forester and gamekeeper: eating buds, young shoots and bark of deciduous trees, especially saplings; taking birds’ eggs, young birds and even young rabbits. In autumn ‘they become bold and enter gardens’ for fruit. Grain, seeds and berries stored but squirrels ‘often never return to their stores.’ Not hibernating — inactive in cold weather, so severe winters limit numbers.

December — Wayfarer

Winter hedgerows: once leaves have fallen, the skeletal branch architecture becomes visible — ‘each small branch adds to the symmetry of the whole tree at the same time as it enables the leaves to receive maximum sunlight.’ Autumn fruits now displayed — scarlet rosehips and crimson hawthorn berries hitherto shrouded in leaves. Empty birds’ nests revealed, varying from ‘simply bundles of twigs’ to ‘carefully woven with straw and grass and lined with feathers’, some ‘surprisingly near to the ground and footpaths.’ Two further winter tree curiosities noted: bracket fungi (polyporus, growing as ‘large white or pink chunks’ from trunks) and mistletoe.

1965 | Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) — April and June only recorded

Archive status: Both April and June 1965 confirmed from original PDFs in Project Files. 1965 complete. Climate context: January 1965 editorial describes 1964 as producing a golden summer from May to October.

April — Wayfarer

A meditation on birdsong prompted by the arrival of spring. Opens with the four greatest British songbirds — Blackbird, Song Thrush, Nightingale and Blackcap — described as ‘probably unrivalled as singers by any other birds in the world.’ With the first mild spring weather, those that wintered here burst into song, ‘soon to be joined by their migrant colleagues, the nightingale and blackcap.’ Singing explained as performed by male birds to attract mates — with the observation that ‘it is seldom that songbirds have both a brilliant plumage and a melodious song.’

A conservation note with historical depth: in Victorian times, the Nightingale and Blackbird were prized as caged birds for their singing. A captured Nightingale arriving fresh from migration could be induced to sing for several months ‘in a futile attempt to secure a mate. It is fortunate indeed that this habit is no longer fashionable.’ The Blackbird is singled out as exceptional

among songbirds in singing at all hours — ‘today, in pouring rain, he has been singing persistently.’

The article closes with the three sounds that most move Wayfarer personally: ‘I am always thrilled to hear the persistent shouts of the cuckoo, the high twittering of the skylark and even the eerie hoots of the owl. Happily the background of man-made sound that we endure is still insufficient to drown these beautiful sounds. Long may it remain so.’ — a quietly conservationist note in 1965, written as the M4 opened through the parish.

June — Wayfarer

The male Orange-tip butterfly as the subject — a focused natural history piece. The male is described as having ‘a large patch of orange colour on its whitish wings’ which ‘immediately characterises it from its more infamous relatives the cabbage-white butterflies.’ In flight, sunlight flashing on those orange tips makes it recognisable from many yards away. Crucially for the local record: ‘Happily this most attractive little butterfly is not rare in the area; it frequents many of the hedgerows and meadows.’

Life cycle described in detail: eggs laid upright on the blossom of Hedge Mustard or Cuckoo Flower; caterpillar described as well camouflaged — ‘its dull bluish-green body with a white stripe agrees so closely with the seed pods of the food plant that its detection is not always easy.’ In August the fully grown caterpillar forms a chrysalis fastened to a stalk, remaining there until the following May or June. The Orange-tip is noted as easily reared in captivity. The article closes with the observation that a patch of stinging nettles is ‘a forboding but usually productive site for the collection of the caterpillar’ — linking back to the June 1964 article on nettles as a butterfly food plant.

1966 | Wayfarer (Peter Tyler)

Archive status: Five Wayfarer articles recovered from the 1966 combined text file (added to Project Files). Exact months uncertain in some cases due to OCR artefacts in the surrounding text — months assigned from internal seasonal content and adjacent issue headers where legible. The contributor list recorded no 1966 entries — the text file is the sole source for this year.

~March — Wayfarer

A vivid account of the first detectable signs of spring. A rise of ten degrees in temperature brings immediate changes across the countryside — birds burst into song with ‘an enthusiasm that has been lacking all winter,’ buds on seemingly dead twigs swell visibly each day, and meadow grass takes on its deepest green. In the garden earthworms work overtime throwing up their casts; hive bees make their first productive flights of the year, finding little nectar yet but pollen on catkins and bulbs. The Snowdrop was the first to flower in Wayfarer’s garden, shortly followed by Crocuses, with Hyacinths soon to come. ‘We have even had a drowsy small tortoiseshell butterfly emerge from hibernation to try out its strikingly patterned wings in the sun.’ On a journey to the north of the county, the first young lambs of the season were seen. ‘Now, surely winter is past and spring cannot be far away.’

~April/May — Wayfarer

An observation about animal tracks running across grass fields at different angles — narrow paths and footways worn by various animals for two practical reasons: first, keeping to established tracks minimises damage to pasture (a herd of cows spreading out into small paths does far less damage than trampling the same ground repeatedly). Second, and more

interesting, these paths lead to water. A newcomer animal arriving on the scene can use the scent of the paths to find water immediately. A possible third reason: established tracks allow animals to flee rapidly back to their homes when threatened. Various examples given: Rats always take the same route to the river and can be tracked easily. Hares are detected by an opening in a hedge. 'Successive generations of weasels may use the same spot, a fact of which poachers are well aware.'

~August — Wayfarer

Article about Lizards — the columnist has many times that summer momentarily caught a glimpse of lizards sunning themselves on paths and sunny banks, though rarely does one present itself for closer examination. The article text is truncated in the archive at this point due to OCR failure.

~September — Wayfarer

Autumn bulb-planting guidance — a practical article on preparing the garden for a spring display. Of daffodils, King Alfred is recommended as excellent, with many of the newer dwarf varieties described as 'really exquisite.' Tulips divided into two groups: the ordinary egg-shaped-flower varieties, and the earlier-flowering wild-tulip types, flowering at the end of March. Red Emperor specifically recommended — 'enormous blazing red-orange blooms with yellow and black splashes inside.' Of the smaller bulbs, Crocuses are much favoured (colour range now from white to purple-red, some flowering mid-winter); Grape Hyacinths, Chionodoxas and Scillas to be massed for best effect. The article closes with a notable conservation-tinged observation: whilst bulb breeders can increase size and produce more exotic colours, 'these (improvements) are often gained at the expense of a reduction in perfume, resistance to weather and overall life of the bulb.'

~November/December — Wayfarer

With leaves fallen from hedgerows, the bare skeleton structure of twigs and branches becomes visible in detail. The autumn fruits are now displayed to full advantage — 'the scarlet of rosehips and the crimson clusters of hawthorn berries, for example — both hitherto shrouded in leaves.' Empty bird nests become visible in the branches; the article notes that nests vary from simple bundles of twigs in a branch fork to those carefully woven with straw and grass and lined with feathers. 'It is surprising how near to the ground and footpaths some nests are built.' With experience one can identify which bird species built a particular nest. Two other curiosities visible once leaves have fallen: bracket fungi — 'large white or pink chunks of polyporus growing out from tree trunks' — and mistletoe, noted as 'that queer parasite which is topical at this season.'

1967 | Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) — final year; departs November 1968

Archive status: 9 entries recovered from 1967 combined text file. Contributor list records 7 months (Feb, Mar, May, Jun, Jul, Sep, Nov). Text file yields 2 additional articles not in the contributor list. Months assigned by seasonal content where issue headers unclear.

~January — Wayfarer

Bare winter hedgerows as subject — the contrast between the dead, withered stems of herbaceous plants (loosestrife, nettle, cow parsley, thistle, teasel) and the more identifiable skeleton structure of woody species. An observational piece about what the stripped-back landscape reveals about plant architecture.

February — Wayfarer

A response to letters from readers about unusual late-season plant behaviour — Miss Iredale-Smith had found a wild rose in full bloom in late November; Miss Bell had noted cacti and succulents thriving but struggling with cyclamens. Wayfarer takes up the cyclamen question directly: the rapid decline of new cyclamens from healthy plant to yellow leaves can sometimes be avoided by keeping them at a constant temperature, ideally near 50F. Best placed in a hall, landing or bedroom rather than the fluctuating temperatures of a living room. Personal testimony: a cyclamen on a west-facing landing window had been blooming for over three years, bearing flowers for at least eight months of the twelve.

March — Wayfarer

Moles as subject — taking advantage of the mild winter (no severe frosts) and throwing up earthworks in profusion. Moles cannot afford to hibernate because they would starve; an adult requires constant food and dies if caged for 10-12 hours, devouring 60 worms a day in captivity. Method of eating worms described — biting off the tail, squeezing the earth out from the head end. Despite the ubiquitous earthworks, Wayfarer has only once seen a mole above ground, in Windsor Great Park — covered in thick velvety fur with minute eyes and ears. The mole moves in a clumsy swimming manner, surprisingly fast, and can get out of sight in 30 seconds. Winter burrowing is harder when frozen soil impedes digging and worms go deep; flooding of burrows also a risk.

~March/April — Wayfarer

Butterflies and early moths in the first warm days of late winter/early spring. Hibernating butterflies — Brimstone (favouring lanes where Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn provide food for eggs), Comma (wings often damaged from the wear of autumn and winter), Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock — all early on the wing, visiting flowers and nettles to lay eggs. Orange-tip noted as a local butterfly appearing in April, fresh and brightly coloured as it overwinters as a chrysalis. Several moths already on the wing: March Moth and Purple Thorn found resting on tree trunks and railings by day, attracted to light after dusk. Cold wind or frost markedly reduces nocturnal moth activity.

~May/June — Wayfarer

Moorhens by the river — a detailed portrait of a locally common but characterful bird. Despite appearing black at first glance, in reality quite colourful: the shield sealing-wax red, beak tipped with yellow. An alert, nervous bird — ‘if alarmed it will pump its tail up and down vigorously and perhaps slip quietly beneath the water.’ Nesting described: a platform of dead rushes and other vegetation built in reed beds or bankside shrubbery. The hen alone incubates; the cob stands guard. Young able to swim almost immediately and later in the season, young of the first brood help feed the second. Song Thrush shell-breaking behaviour also described — using a stone as an anvil to smash snail shells, leaving characteristic piles of broken shells (‘snail middens’) beside favoured stones.

~May/June — Wayfarer (slugs and snails)

Slugs and snails as garden pests — all damage done at night, emerging from hiding places under stones, wood, large clods, and wall creepers. The article notes that snails use the same hiding places night after night and can be collected there by day. Breeding, feeding behaviour and the role of moisture described. Garden butterflies mentioned in passing — Red Admiral, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma all common in summer gardens.

July — Wayfarer

Kestrel observed above the paddock by Oak Stubbs Lane by several local residents — Wayfarer's own account. The kestrel, like Skylarks (which twittered above the same field), had arrived on the scene. At about a hundred feet, the kestrel appears to remain poised, head invariably pointing into the wind, tail spread, wings extended — reminiscent of a toy kite. Head bent downwards to search for movement in the grass below. A Field Vole's brownish coat blends so well with soil and grass blades that an unpractised eye would fail to see it even if its precise position were pointed out. The kestrel supplements its diet with cockchafer beetles, reportedly catching them in its claws in flight and transferring to the beak without alighting. The kestrel has learnt to attach itself to human residences rather than becoming self-banished, making it almost unique among hawks in its adaptability.

~August/September — Wayfarer

Grasshoppers and other Orthoptera — likely written during or after a visit to the South Downs (contributor list: 'Butterflies and grasshoppers on the South Downs'). The short-horned grasshoppers (Acrididae) described in detail: the young nymph hatches resembling the adult but with a relatively large head and no wings; moults five times before reaching adult form. The characteristic 'chirp' or stridulation produced by rubbing the hind leg across the wing veins. Grasshoppers sun themselves on south-facing chalk banks and can leap prodigious distances relative to body size.

November — Wayfarer

Plant galls — an article prompted by a collection of galls brought to Wayfarer by readers. Galls are growths on plants caused by the activities of parasites — almost any aerial or subterranean part of a plant may become galled by some agent (insect, mite, fungus, bacterium or nematode). Whatever its form, a gall is derived wholly from host plant tissue, never from the parasite itself. The oak is host to the greatest variety of galls in Britain. Oak-apple and Robin's pincushion (bedeguar gall) described. Historical note: tannic acid extracted from galls was used for centuries in the dyeing of cloth and in the preparation of ink — 'the Romans used it for producing permanent black on silk and other fabrics.'

1968 | Wayfarer (Peter Tyler) to November, then Brock (David Shott) from December

Archive status: 5 entries recovered from 1968 combined text file. Contributor list records: Feb (Robins), Mar (Flood/insects), plus Nov 1968 (plant galls — first Brock column). Text file has heavy OCR artefacts in some months. Months assigned from context.

~February — Wayfarer

Robins seeking shelter from winter damp — the article describes how Robins, unlike most small birds, do not simply rely on roosting in dense cover but actively seek out sheltered, humid-free spaces. The winter plumage of many small birds noted; the Robin's familiar red breast a constant through the year. [Article text partially recovered from OCR.]

~March — Wayfarer

Flood survival of hibernating insects and beetles — the article examines how invertebrates that hibernate in or near the soil survive the flooding conditions prevalent in the low-lying parish. Focuses on the mechanisms that allow beetles and other insects to survive temporary inundation. [Contributor list entry; article text recovered only partially due to OCR damage.]

~May — Wayfarer/Brock

Sawflies — a group of insects that can defoliate trees, related to wasps but without the wasp-waist, commonly coloured yellow, green, orange or black. The saw-like cutter possessed by females gives the group its name — used to make incisions in leaves and twigs to receive eggs. In the garden, Gooseberry Sawfly caterpillars devour leaves of gooseberry and currant leaving only the ripening fruit on bare twigs. Another species feeds in colonies on Poplar leaves; a third on Solomon's Seal. Pine Sawflies are a major pest of young pine plantations.

~Autumn — Brock

Fungi — a general survey article on the diversity of the fungus kingdom in autumn. The familiar toadstool growths visible above ground are only the fruiting body; the main body (mycelium) lies hidden below. Field Mushroom found in rich pasture or grassland; Fairy Rings described, some known to be over four centuries old. Warning about poisonous species: Devil's Boletus, Destroying Angel, Fool's Mushroom and Death Cap — 'general appearance and odour are an insufficient guide' to identification.

November/December — Brock (first columns)

Plant galls and tannic acid content — Brock's debut Nature Notes, continuing the theme Wayfarer had written about in November 1967. More detailed and scientific treatment, examining the chemical content of galls and the role of tannic acid. This marks the transition between Wayfarer (personal, lyrical) and Brock (more rigorous, ecological).

1969 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 6 entries recovered from 1969 combined text file. Contributor list records 5 months. Text file yields one additional article (animal tracks — a topic also seen in 1966 and 1969, likely the same subject revisited).

~February — Brock

The happy chorus of birds as days lengthen — the gradual return of birdsong through February as daylight increases. Multiple species noted. [Article partially recovered.]

~April — Brock

Animal tracks through grass and hedgerow — the many well-defined pathways beaten through grass fields by various animals. Some of human origin, others made by animals: routes to water are a primary driver; established tracks also allow rapid retreat. Specific examples: rats always take the same route to the river; hares detected by openings in hedges; successive generations of weasels use the same spot in a hedge — a fact known to poachers. Kingfisher noted as a locally frequent sighting at the river — 'living close to a river, we are treated to the Kingfisher, the most attractive bird of this country, with its unique brilliance of colour.'

~April — Brock

Returning Swifts and Cuckoos — the arrival of summer migrants. Contributor list entry; article text not fully recovered from this file.

~May — Brock

Bees pollinating marrow crops — practical observation about bee-crop interaction. Contributor list entry.

~June — Brock

Identifying introduced tree species through pollen grains in ancient peat beds — a scientific article about the palynological evidence for tree species introduction. Great deal of research devoted to semi-fossilised remains in ancient peat beds; pollen grains preserved in enormous quantities allow identification of plant species by shape. Using this technique, geologists have established that trees like Spruce were absent from Britain in prehistoric times and were later introduced.

~October — Brock

Autumn bird populations changing; thrush relatives arriving from the North Sea countries. Winter bird-feeding guidance — encouraging garden birds at the bird-table in autumn; Gooseberry bushes to be netted to prevent Blue Tits stripping the buds before next year's crop.

1970 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 8 entries recovered from 1970 combined text file. A very rich year with multiple ecological articles.

March — Brock

How plants survive freezing — written mid-February in icy conditions, musing on how plant cells avoid death at low temperatures. Unlike a water pipe, a plant cell does not simply rupture; the mechanisms of antifreeze chemistry in plant tissues explained.

~April — Brock

Black-headed gulls stealing from Lapwings and Redwings/Fieldfares — a detailed observation from Brock's own field. For three weeks, the field had been a feeding ground for a large mixed flock of winter-visiting Redwings and Fieldfares. A group of Black-headed Gulls learnt to stand among the thrushes and recognise the body movements indicating a successful find (earthworm). At such a signal they ran or flew at the thrush which either dropped its prey or flew off with it dangling; the gull made repeated swoops until the harassed bird dropped its find. Lapwings treated the same way. The gulls roost at Staines Reservoirs — known for flocks of up to 100,000 birds during bad winter weather in January. The round journey from Staines to Dorney and back is some twelve miles, done daily.

~May — Brock

Water cress safety — whether it is safe to eat watercress from local streams. Answer: unwise to risk it. The reason: vegetation growing in streams and marshy places can carry an infective stage in the life cycle of the Liver Fluke — a parasitic flatworm using fresh-water snails as an intermediate host.

~June/July — Brock

Chlorophyll and photosynthesis — plants' green pigment and the process of building complex substances from water and carbon dioxide. Light supplies the energy; chlorophyll traps it. Educational article aimed at general readers.

~July/August — Brock

Weeds and seed banks — the old saying ‘one year’s seeding makes seven years’ weeding’ explained. Successful weed plants have characteristics that ensure germination over multiple years.

~September — Brock

Dodder — a parasitic plant found in two patches in Marsh Lane. Member of the convolvulus family, parasitising Hop and Nettle. Although Hop and Nettle are common locally, Dodder itself is rare. The plant has no chlorophyll — entirely dependent on its host. The article follows on from an earlier piece about Broomrape, another local parasite.

~October — Brock

Spiders and their webs in late summer — in early morning, dew collected on webs makes them visible across the entire landscape. Spiders belong to the same group of animals as insects and crustaceans. Article covers web construction, prey capture, and spider identification.

November — Brock

Sewage treatment and river pollution — what happens when untreated sewage is pumped into a river. Small quantities do little harm, actually providing food for micro-organisms. But large quantities create oxygen depletion. A conservation-minded article in European Conservation Year (1970).

1971 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 8 entries recovered from 1971 combined text file.

~January/February — Brock

Winter bird-table guidance — this is the hardest time for garden birds; a bird-table positioned in front of a window, provisioned regularly, will attract a wide variety. The more varied the food, the greater the variety of species attracted.

~February — Brock

Signs of spring approaching — ducks on the river paired off for weeks, now free from wildfowling; will soon choose nesting sites. Once prepared, the nest will be lined with soft brown breast feathers, also used to cover eggs when the duck leaves. Early spring described.

~March — Brock

Badger watching — preparations visible at the sett entrance for the arrival of new cubs; traces of bedding caught in projecting roots. Brock spent several evenings badger watching. A vivid account — ‘A rapid descent from a tree after badger watching’ (contributor list description suggests the watch ended abruptly).

~April — Brock

Bewick’s Swans heard calling on the moonlit evening of 2nd March, flying almost due east — returning to summer breeding quarters in Arctic Russia and Siberia. Fairly frequent winter visitors, arriving in November, leaving after the beginning of March. Migration navigation discussed: ringing shows routes taken; young birds make the journey unaccompanied by

parents; many migrants fly at night using stars to navigate; cloudy skies ground them; lighthouses around the coast attract birds that have been caught on the wing. First green on hawthorn buds; Coltsfoot appearing in roadside verges; bees flying freely and returning heavily laden with pollen.

~May — Brock

Ecologists' warnings about environmental poisoning — the difficulty of making the general public take such predictions seriously when those in positions of authority counter them with reassurance. A prescient conservation article from 1971.

~June — Brock

Swallows back in their shed — the returning pair built a new nest on top of last year's (still in good shape). The new nest shaped like a saucer, made of mud, lined with dry grass and old feathers. Followed by an article identifying mature earthworms.

~October — Brock

Woodpigeons gorging on acorns in the Oak tree — caught in the act from upstairs windows, jerking and pulling at the acorns. Whilst walking in Trumper's Field, a Bank Vole seen in the top branch of a hawthorn bush, nibbling away oblivious to observation.

~November — Brock

Spider gossamer flight / identifying male and female earthworms — Brock observed a vole in Trumper's Field in the top of a hawthorn bush, silhouetted against the motorway lights.

1972 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 2 entries recovered from 1972 combined text file. Contributor list records more months; OCR likely truncated additional articles.

~March/April — Brock

A warm spell in March had an immediate effect on the countryside — trees in hedgerows suddenly took on a green haze, Coltsfoot appeared in roadside verges, butterflies appeared in gardens. Bees made full use of warmer weather to cart out rubbish from the hives.

~Autumn — Brock

Plant galls — a collection of galls brought to Brock by readers over several weeks. Galls are growths caused by the activities of parasites; almost any part of the aerial or subterranean system of a plant may become galled. Whatever its form, a gall is derived wholly from host plant tissue. The oak is host to the greatest variety of galls in Britain.

1973 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 3 entries recovered from 1973 combined text file.

~Spring — Brock

Swine Vesicular Disease outbreak at Colnbrook — Dorney found itself very close to an affected area. Two farms (Colnbrook and between them) lost over 2,000 head of pigs. Article discusses

the disease, its spread, and the culling measures taken. This is one of the very few nature columns that addresses agricultural disease directly, noting the parallel risk to wildlife.

~June/July — Brock

Bee swarming — the mechanics of swarm formation. At least two swarms were flying in the middle of the month (one over the Primary School sports afternoon, another nearby two days later). Neither was taken. The traditional rhyme quoted: 'A swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay; in June worth a silver spoon; in July isn't worth a fly' — explained in terms of the timing available for the new colony to build up stores before winter.

~Autumn — Brock

Badger protection — Brock welcomes news that the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders are considering giving up the use of the traditional badger head as adornment of their sporrans. A quietly conservationist note.

1974 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: Full text now available from 1974_combined_Rev3.txt (12 articles). Replaces previous contributor-list-only entry.

~December/January — Brock

Grebes on local waters — Little Grebe (Dabchick) widespread on local reaches of the River; several can be seen diving and surfacing 20 seconds later. Great Crested Grebe on gravel pits below Bray, dives lasting up to 40 seconds. The mixed flocks of winter-visiting thrushes making short work of hawthorn hedgerow berries in the cold spell at the beginning of December.

April — Brock

Cress Brook and the ground water inquiry — wandering into the field between Marsh Lane and Cress Brook, Brock finds the brook has been cleared for part of its length and has more water than for many a month. The upper section used to hold sufficient fish for fishing licences to be issued — those days are gone. Water extraction by the local Water Board (Ministerial Appeal still awaited) threatens to dry up the springs at Lot's Hole that feed the brook. The probable explanation for local springs: under Dorney soils lie gravels up to 40 feet thick over a tilted chalk bed, with a clay layer appearing downstream. Water flows through gravel and chalk in a SE direction. Ground water contour maps produced from wells and borehole data — seasonal fluctuation of the water table documented.

~February/March — Brock

Ground water follow-up — contour maps of local ground water levels produced, showing directional flow through gravels. Evidence from the 1973 Public Inquiry: drillings suggest an old buried watercourse (former river channel) exists on the A-B line of the survey. Water table rises and falls seasonally in the many deep holes throughout the parish.

~March/April — Brock

Mad March Hares in Oak Stubbs Field (the Water Board Appeal Site) — two brown hares observed at intervals during the last week of March and first of April, chasing each other around the centre of the field, stopping to rear up on hind legs and box. Historical context: Brown Hare arrived in Britain after the 4th glaciation; absent from Ireland and Scotland as those islands were already cut off. The Blue Hare of Scotland and Irish Hare are distinct sub-species which turn

white in winter — in Ireland this has become an incomplete change as a white coat there would advertise their presence.

~May/June — Brock

Public Footpath No. 8 (Barge Path) — Climo's Corner to the Towpath. Named from the time when barges offloaded chaldrons of coal on the towpath. The fields north of the path were once part of the large Oak Stubbs field, under strip cultivation until nearly halfway through the last century, as was Thames Field to the south. The smaller field to the south is known as Further Park. Early bee swarming reports in mid-May — weather too cold to inspect hives. On first check Brock found queen cells in one hive.

~June — Brock

Dutch Elm Disease — unabated throughout the parish; now that leaves are on healthy trees, which ones are suffering is visible. Government abandoned mass-felling programme. Dead or dying elms must be removed or burnt along with their bark beetles (Scolytidae) to prevent spread of the fungal disease. Leaving elm trunks covered in bark as public seats (as at the Recreation Ground in Eton) and leaving stumps in the ground only perpetuates the problem. Ozone depletion also discussed — concern being expressed about the disappearance of ozone from the upper atmosphere; the article predicts warming consequences. A dry and hot summer trend noted — contrary to the expected historical cycle.

July — Brock

Crowned Crane reported by several local residents following the June article — confirmed as the same unusual bird seen around Dorney. Whether escapee or casual migrant speculated upon. On Dorney Common: large light-coloured patches of Wall Barley (*Hordeum murinum*), a weed of roadside verges, avoided by cattle — the heavy seed crop expected to produce even larger areas next year, with significant loss of grazing for commoners. Corn Marigold (*Glebionis segetum*) making a good showing in one parish field — known as Guild Weed; indicator of acid/calcium-deficient conditions; produces 1,400-1,500 seeds per plant.

~July/August — Brock (holiday — salt marshes)

Salt marsh flora on holiday — only ~30 flowering plant species survive the difficult conditions of salt marshes out of ~2,000 British species. Plants face physiological drought at high tide (salt solution stronger than plant sap draws water out of tissues). Special adaptations described. Each incoming tide deposits mud, gradually raising the soil level until only the highest tides cover it.

November — Brock

Ozone layer — following up July's mention, the breakdown is due to chlorofluoromethanes (aerosol propellants) reaching the upper atmosphere, releasing chlorine atoms that destroy ozone. Scientists fear that at the present rate, 10% of ozone will have been removed before long — resulting in heavy UV exposure and destruction of living material. Sugar shortage this year affecting beekeeping — Ministry of Agriculture making available 15lbs sugar per hive for winter stores. Gull dawn and dusk flights between Staines Reservoirs and rubbish dump feeding grounds noted.

~Autumn — Brock

Myxomatosis — rabbit colony on the south side of the M4 wiped out. In May, Brock had noted large numbers on the north side and wondered when they would reach the south. By autumn

not a live rabbit visible. Disease spread by rabbit flea in Britain (less effective than Australian mosquito vector). Some animals developing genetic resistance; they can rebuild colonies fairly quickly.

1975 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 12 entries recovered from 1975 combined text file — exceptionally well-preserved year.

~January — Brock

Flooding — the heavy November rain caused the river to rise to levels not seen in ten years. Water rose through the gravels to fill low-lying areas throughout the parish. Mention of a 1973 Public Inquiry where the Water Board promised to put an end to flooding — not yet delivered. Gull identification sketches also produced this month. Article on compaction of soil by tankers on field gateways.

~December/January — Brock

Mild weather and unseasonal plant blooming — gardens with up to twenty plants in bloom on Christmas Day; both spring flowers slightly early and late summer/autumn plants that had simply not stopped. First time May and wild plum blossom seen in the same week as Christmas. The mild winter of 1974/75 examined in the context of plant growth cycles.

~March — Brock

The Mad March Hare — hares are elusive unless you know where to look. Unlike rabbits, they live on the surface, making their forms in grassland or fields with tallish vegetation. On arable they lie in the furrows. Their behaviour during the March breeding season described.

~April — Brock

Blackbird nest construction — detailed observation of a hen blackbird building a nest in clematis against the garage wall, only two metres from a house window. Material: mainly leaf skeletons built up into a platform about 25cm thick. Notably, no mud used to bind the structure. Query raised as to how the nest would hold when vigorous offspring started to move.

~May — Brock

Blackbird nest follow-up — the nest had survived; the family fledged successfully. Sequel to previous month. While away, the eggs had hatched and the young had fledged.

~June — Brock

A mottled male Blackbird with two wives — a neighbour revealed that the mottled male (already noted by Brock) had a second nest nearby. Two sets of nestlings hatched simultaneously, placing extreme demands on the male's foraging. An unusual domestic arrangement observed over several weeks.

July — Brock (observation hive)

A glass-sided observation hive set up in May to show school children the internal activities of a bee colony. No queen provided — the colony raised one from eggs or young grubs. Four special queen cells (acorn-shaped) produced by the bees from existing comb cells. A detailed account of the bee colony's social structure observed directly.

~September — Brock

Water surface insects — Pond Skaters and Water Boatmen and other bugs exploiting the water surface as a specialised habitat; piercing and sucking mouthparts; the group encountered both in garden and house as well as on water.

~October — Brock

Ragwort — poisonous yellow-flowered weed abounding in some pastures and roadside verges in the parish. Cattle and horses tend to avoid it. The Cinnabar Moth caterpillar (yellow and black striped) is notably able to flourish on it.

~November — Brock

Honeybees and runner bean flowers — the honeybee's tongue too short to reach nectar at the base of the fused petal tube. Two species of short-tongued bumblebee have discovered how to bite a hole at the base of the flower and so take the nectar — a form of nectar robbery. The honeybee then also uses these holes.

~November/December — Brock

Ecology course at Flatford Mill — a week at the Field Studies Council's centre at Flatford Mill (John Constable's famous painting location) and Willy Lot's Cottage, with students on an 'A' level ecology course. Detailed observations of the Suffolk landscape and ecology.

~December — Brock

Great changes in farming pattern over 30 years — mixed farming giving way to intensive arable systems; hedges removed for larger fields; the loss of wildlife habitat. A strong conservationist statement about the decline of farmland biodiversity. Hedge survey data referenced.

1976 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 12 entries recovered from 1976 combined text file — another exceptionally well-preserved year.

~January — Brock

Parish hedge survey — Brock surveyed every field-hedge in the parish, producing a map showing field names and hedge ages. Results shown in graph form: age-frequency of hedges; woody species counts in average 30-yard lengths. 52 hedges sampled. This is a significant baseline ecological record for Dorney parish hedgerows.

~January/February — Brock

African Crowned Crane sighting — over the past two years, several local residents had reported sightings. Just before Christmas Brock himself saw this large bird (38 inches high), long-necked and long-legged, at the end of the first week of January. The last two mild winters had made it possible for this escape from captivity to survive. Confirmation of its identification described.

~February/March — Brock

Viruses — flu sweeping through the area. The nature of viruses: peculiar in that in many ways they are unlike other living things; they do not fit all requirements considered necessary to make

them alive; invisible under a high-powered light microscope; only visible under an electron microscope. An educationally-minded natural history departure.

~March — Brock

Mad March Hare revisited — dog disturbed a hare twice in three days from the same spot under a fallen tree. Hares do not dig burrows but excavate a small depression or form. Detailed behaviour description.

~April — Brock

Two fox cubs rescued after their vixen was shot in a south London suburban garden shed. Vixen had given birth to five cubs around 3rd March. Cubs given to zoologists at London University studying fox behaviour. When seen on 18th March they were about eight inches long, blind and characteristically russet-coloured. This follows up on the 1975 articles and leads into the 1977 follow-up.

~May — Brock

Bees at the garden pond — using the pond for drinking and water collection, coming in very large numbers when the nectar flow is slow or honey being stored. Normally the right concentration of the feeding workers directs the others to the nectar source.

~June/July — Brock

Climate change — following Isobar's comment on changing weather patterns and the possible connection between decreasing polar ice-cap and recent mild winters. If the two are really linked then the trend will continue as a result of engineering operations now taking place on a continental scale. A remarkably prescient article from 1976.

~August — Brock (drought year)

Drought effects on soil — 1976 was the exceptional drought year. After the drought finally broke, rain needed to go deep into the soil (not just moisten the top few centimetres) to be effective. Plants that had been forced by drought to produce only surface roots then suffered as dry conditions returned.

~August/September — Brock

Wasps' nest in a roof cavity in Burnham — called out by police. The colony had extended their nest by chewing away the wood of the roof timbers and had been undetected until they broke through into the living space. The difference between bees and wasps explained.

~September — Brock

House Martins in their hundreds at the new Datchet reservoir — sweeping after insects in preparation for migration. Brock observed them from the embankment, watching more birds arriving to join the flock, all with their inbuilt desire to move as far as South Africa.

~October/November — Brock

Lot's Hole and the water table — after heavy rains, the water table in the ground rose once again to fill Lot's Hole and thirty yards downstream. This rise reflected also in the Thames level and local gravel pits. A careful observation about the local hydrology.

~December — Brock

Parish field name map — Brock had been asked to produce a map of the parish showing old fields with their names. Historical survey article showing field boundaries and names as a baseline record for future ecological comparison.

1977 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 10 entries recovered from 1977 combined text file.

~February — Brock

Update on the hand-reared fox cubs from 1976 — now living in a research unit at Royal Holloway College where work into their behaviour was underway, aimed at understanding the possible rapid spread of diseases such as rabies. Photos showed them to be fine, healthy foxes.

~February/March — Brock (rabies series)

Rabies — Britain has not always been free from rabies; in 1420 the Duke of York described it in hounds. Canine madness was a serious problem in Midland towns especially in the 19th century; as late as 1886 there was an outbreak amongst deer in Windsor Great Park. A detailed historical and scientific article prompted by concerns about the disease's potential spread from the continent.

~April — Brock

Toxocariasis — the blindness caused by roundworm parasites of cats and dogs (*Toxocara*). Although such tragedies are extremely rare, the risk exists and should be borne in mind. Various worm parasites common in cats and dogs; the type causing toxocariasis is a roundworm whose larvae can migrate to the human eye.

~April/May — Brock

Sand Martins — first sand martins of the year seen on 13th March while sailing on a gravel pit at Staines; a group of six quartering the water in search of insects. Later in the afternoon they had gone, having continued their migratory flight from Africa. Article on the Sand Martin's biology and the use of gravel pit sand banks as nesting habitat.

~June — Brock

Beech tree mast year — 1976 must have been a very good year for beech trees; masses of seedlings coming up under the trees in spring 1977. Of thousands of seeds produced by one tree, perhaps only one or two will find themselves in favourable conditions for survival. Nature's strategy of mass production against the odds.

~July — Brock

Water Crowfoot on the Common — Brock had remarked that in 14 years in Dorney he had not seen Water Crowfoot growing on the Common; Colonel Palmer confirmed he could not remember seeing it there either. The seed had apparently been lying dormant for a good few years before germinating. Article on seaweeds in rock pools as a follow-on.

~September — Brock

Rookery survey — two evenings watching a flock of between two and three hundred rooks making short flights between trees close to the river on the Bray side opposite Trumper's Field. The great flock would periodically take off and fly to one of the three rookeries in the area. Detailed rookery survey article.

~October — Brock

Heron at the gravel pit at Taplow — two or three times noticed a heron quartering the water; it had learnt to land on the water much as a gull might do, scooping up a fish and swallowing it before taking off again. An unusual observed behaviour.

~November — Brock

Canada Geese flocks flying over Dorney most mornings — flock varying in number from 15 to 48. Canada Geese introduced to Britain from North America; background on the species' history as an introduced bird now well established.

~December — Brock

Origins of native plants — three categories: native (not known to have been introduced by human agency); endemic (only known from Britain or a special region); and introduced. An exploration of how our local flora came to be through plant geography and history.

1978 | Brock (David Shott)

Archive status: 11 articles from 1978_combined.txt (one is a duplicate; one truncated). Very good OCR quality.

February — Brock

Wondering whether Water Crowfoot will repeat 1977's display now that standing water is back in the Common ponds. Rook colonies expected to be smaller and more scattered due to loss of suitable elms — the large Amerden colony has had to find a new home; the dead elm twigs of Dorney Court unlikely to support nests this year. Personal record-keeping practice described: Brock records the first date each spring of Coltsfoot, Primrose, Snowdrop, Violet, and Dandelion in bloom; first butterfly, first frogspawn, first rook nest-building, Chaffinch in full song, new green on hawthorn — readers encouraged to keep the same records for future comparison.

~March — Brock

Badger sett activity — sow badgers excavating new chambers in which they will give birth to cubs (usually in April). Cubs not allowed out of the sett for some weeks after birth. Article also covers Cedar of Lebanon — very difficult to germinate in Britain. Lebanon's cedar forests being cleared at a rate that could exhaust supplies of the timber by the year 2000; Brock notes an offer made for a magnificent specimen on Brownsea Island.

~April — Brock

Formal rookery survey — conducted in mid-April to see how rooks were reacting to the loss of their normal nesting sites through Dutch Elm Disease. Three sites mapped (map published with article). 75 nests counted in total. Tree species used: Horse Chestnut (27 nests), Ash (15 nests), Willow (5 nests), Poplar, plus dead elm twigs still used as nesting material — rooks forced to snap off sticky-bud Horse Chestnut twigs, which requires considerable force.

April — Brock

Cormorants at Datchet (Queen Mother) Reservoir — flocks of up to 30 or more, resting on concrete pump towers and reservoir sides with wings half-extended to dry. Flying regularly between the reservoir and gravel pits at Middle Green, Langley. Article on cormorant biology and fishing cormorants. Their Latin name (Phalacrocorax) a corruption of 'sea crow'.

~June — Brock

Drought effects on young trees — another dry spell taking its toll of saplings planted to replace dead elms. Sandy local soil has very limited capillary action — water rises only about a foot from the water table. Young trees without established deep roots suffering and dying unless properly watered.

September — Brock

Defence of the spider — an impassioned article. Census in a typical Sussex field found over 2 million spiders per acre, each consuming about 100 insects per year. 'Imagine two million pairs of jaws in an acre field, all ready to snap at an insect.' Not all spiders spin webs: Zebra Spider stalks flies on walls; Trapdoor Spider builds silk tubes in dry stone walls. The garden orb spider described. Readers urged not to kill the house spider.

~August/September — Brock

Bird-watching at Hayle (Cornwall, on holiday) — arriving at low tide, watching gulls (mainly Herring and Black-headed) at roost on saltmarsh, with a Great Black-backed Gull maintaining a clearing around itself through its predatory reputation. Various waders working the water's edge. Full gull roost behaviour described (roost vs feeding flock; moult stages of Black-headed Gull).

October — Brock

Herring Gull brought to Brock at school — unable to fly but no structural injury. RSPCA arranged transfer to a bird hospital in Slough which was receiving several similar birds, apparently poisoned at refuse tips. Usually recovered after a week's good feeding. Gulls' remains found in fields explained by fox and badger predation on the poisoned birds. Rooks cracking walnuts — scattered split walnuts found in fields some distance from the nearest trees; Brock describes the remarkable bill strength needed.

November — Brock

Fungi scarce in autumn 1978 — dry conditions prevented normal fruiting. Fly maggots getting into slow-growing mushrooms before they reached edible size. Dry spell also note: the bumper cereal harvest, but grass not growing sufficiently for cattle. Mushroom identification — no simple rule to distinguish edible from poisonous species.

~May — Brock

Badger persecution — a badger crossing the road in Brock's car headlights triggers concern. Over the past few years, concerted action against local setts (in Taplow, within a mile) has been evident. The article is truncated in the archive at this point.

— *End of 1978. 1979–1989 appended below.* —

1979 | Brock (David Shott) — Final Year

8 articles from 1979_combined.txt. Article [5] is Brock's farewell and introduction of Lois Parker as his successor. Excellent OCR quality.

~February — Brock

Snails eating parish council notice-board paper — the Parish Clerk elsewhere reported that snails were chewing away at any paper material placed on the board so that within two days the notice was barely legible and after three it had been completely eaten or blown away in pieces. Brock examines the phenomenon: snails and slugs are known to eat paper and cardboard, probably because of the cellulose content.

~April — Brock (RSPB garden bird survey)

An RSPB survey in which over 25,000 people reported birds seen in their gardens between 8 and 9am on 27th January — possibly aided by a mention on Blue Peter. A remarkable early example of citizen science. Brock discusses results and local garden bird populations.

May — Brock

Maggots / scavenging insects and nitrogen recycling — Brock collected road-side verge rubbish and put it in the boiler. Next evening the ashes were alive with maggots which had migrated out overnight. An article on the role of scavenging insects in recycling nitrogen and organic matter — 'do not begrudge the maggot his meal.'

~May/June — Brock

A late spring — writing in mid-April, no real sign of warmth until suddenly all signs appeared at once. Collared Dove spread discussed: from the Middle East and south-east Europe, the Collared Dove has spread at an extraordinary pace across Europe, reaching Britain in 1955. By 1979 it had become commonplace. Brock describes its characteristic triple coo.

~Summer — Brock (farewell)

Brock's farewell notice — the editors announce that Brock has been writing Nature Notes for many years and that the Parish has come to rely on these delightful articles. He is finding it more and more difficult to find time and inspiration, and suggests someone new may be willing to contribute. The editors join readers in thanking him warmly. This ends over a decade of the Brock column, written by David Shott of Meadow Way, Dorney. (The earlier 'Wayfarer' column of 1962–1968 was Peter Tyler's, who would revive the Wayfarer name again in 2019.)

~Late Summer/Autumn — Brock (bees in a roof)

The 'phone rang — a swarm of bees in trouble. Brock spent 11 hours dealing with a colony that had been living in a roof for years: the original swarm had been taken from a tree but the bulk of the colony (the flying bees) remained in the roof. Solution: hang the new hive from the roof on ropes so it rested against the wall near the bees' entrance point. Eventually all the flying bees transferred into the hive. A continuation article the following month described the final stages.

September/October — Brock

The Large Blue Butterfly — several recent reports that it still exists despite being thought extinct through failure to breed in known haunts in the West. Brock cautious about whether the sightings

are reliable; describes the species in detail and distinguishing features from similar species. Notes that the decline is linked to loss of its host ant species (*Myrmica sabuleti*) and red ant colony requirements.

November/December — Brock

Cress Brook and water levels — monitoring article. Also: survival potential of the Large Blue Butterfly continued.

1980–1981 | No nature column

Confirmed blank years. No nature columnist between Brock's departure (Oct 1979) and Lois Parker's first regular column (Nov 1985). Both files contain full DPN content — Lois Parker appears only as Secretary of the Dorney Women's Institute.

1982 | Lois Parker — Evins Nature Competition Essay

Not a regular column — Lois Parker won the Evins Nature Competition (in memory of Mr and Mrs Evins of Dorney Reach) with this essay. Submitted as a letter to the editor. An extraordinary document revealing Lois Parker and her husband Bill as dedicated amateur naturalists already recording at the highest level.

July 1982 — Evins Competition Essay (Lois Parker)

Since returning to live in Dorney Reach, Lois and her husband Bill have been observing flora and fauna in their garden and along the M4 footpath banks and hedges. Bill Parker is an amateur lepidopterist who runs an actinic light trap throughout the year, recording moths and sending results to the Nature Conservancy Council. The catch is photographed then released. In August 1976 a moth appeared in the trap that had never before been taken in the British Isles, though widely distributed in Europe and Asia. Bill is assistant curator at the British Entomological Society; a colleague identified it as a fanfoot, confirmed by the British Museum as *Herminia lunalis* — given the English name 'Jubilee Fanfoot' and entered into the Museum's scientific records. A British first.

Among common butterflies, the Holly Blue noted as infrequent locally. Cycling to work via the M4 footpath, Lois observed birds including Fieldfare, Redwing, Goldfinch and Blackcap (Blackcap and Goldfinch now tending to overwinter rather than migrate, due to milder winters). Also Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, White-throat, Sparrowhawk, and game birds — Pheasant and Partridge. Flora along the M4 banks included many species brought in on lorries from the Continent; also Spotted Orchid and Bee Orchid in one stretch. The essay closes noting that entries came from no children — Lois expresses hope for more engagement from younger residents.

1983 | Lois Parker — Evins Nature Competition Poem

Lois Parker won the Nature Poetry prize in the 1983 Evins Competition. The poem 'Dorney Autumn' is a richly observed seasonal record in verse — species named include: Old Man's Beard (Traveller's Joy), blackberries, wild geese, lapwings, swallows, Thames, reed warblers, adder, wood mice, vixen, squirrels, chestnuts, mushrooms, acorns, sloes, thistledown, scarlet toadstools.

1983 — Dorney Autumn (Lois Parker, poem)

'Golden fields and golden light, golden leaves and berries bright, Old Man's beard silver-white, purple blackberries, velvet night...' The poem moves through the season: pearl clouds and woodsmoke; wild geese with strong wings whirling; lapwings skirling; swallows poised to flee winter. The Thames glistening; reed warblers in the reeds where swallows cast their shadows. Adder slides, wood mice scatter; vixen hides, squirrels chatter. Chestnuts, mushrooms, acorns, sloes; down of thistle on the breeze; scarlet toadstools, bursting pods — the fruitful Reach at ease. A remarkable compressed ecological portrait of the parish in autumn.

1984 | No nature column

Confirmed blank year. Files contain full DPN content (including hedgerow management discussion and nature competition references) but no nature column.

1985 | Lois Parker — First Regular Columns (Nov & Dec)

2 articles from 1985_combined.txt — Lois Parker's first two regular columns. Both bi-monthly (Sep/Oct and Oct/Nov format she will maintain throughout her run).

September/October 1985 — Lois Parker

A welcome change in the weather giving a pleasant autumn with many warm, sunny days. The river barely moving on a still autumn morning; ripples made only by a pair of Great Crested Grebe emerging from the mist — described in detail: grey-brown upper parts, satiny-white under parts, long slender neck and narrow head with a silky, russet 'ear' frill. Classified as a rare bird until early 20th century when their plumes became unfashionable for hat decoration. Resident pair on the river again. Kestrel on a favourite hawthorn perch at the foot of the M4 bridge — observed closely hovering.

October/November 1985 — Lois Parker

Skeins of Canada Geese flying over, heading for stubble fields. Male Kestrel with a favourite hawthorn perch at the M4 bridge — close view of hovering. Details of meadow pipit, a likely prey species; Kestrel's pellets described. Mushrooms appearing; autumn colours on the river banks.

1986 | Lois Parker — First Full Year

11 articles from 1986_combined.txt. Lois Parker's columns cover bi-monthly periods. Rich year for bird and plant records from the river and M4 footpath.

November/December 1985 (pub. Feb 1986) — Lois Parker

Alder cones turned brown, catkins deep wine colour. Blackberry leaves reddish-purple. Yews bright with scarlet berries. Flocks of pigeons — mostly straying racing pigeons. Hedgehog hibernating but sometimes woken by mild spells. A Barn Owl flying in the early evening seen twice near the old barns. Cormorants at Bray Lock in the cold weather — nine perched high in a tall tree at the end of an eyot, black and motionless after an earlier fishing session.

January/February 1986 — Lois Parker

A solitary alder bearing large yellow catkins seen unusually early in mid-January — a hopeful sign of spring. Sallow willows with silvery palm growing apace. Lime trees shooting out new

deep crimson twigs. Weeping willows pale gold with new growth. Sticky buds still closed on horse chestnuts. Rooks nest-building at the M4 rookery — 24 nests, an increase on last year. Robin with injured beak and Blackbird with one leg — both still present in Harcourt Road gardens and doing well.

February/March 1986 — Lois Parker

From 5th February winter gripped hard. Tufted Duck appeared on the Thames. Nine Cormorants perched high in a tall tree at end of an eyot between Bray Lock and Bray Village. Swans exploring the M4 bridge eyot. Nuthatches and Tree Creepers coming into gardens along the river. Nuthatches shy — nuts on a table a great attraction. Elm trees lamented: no longer will we see rust-pink flowers and young limes with sweet-smelling bloom along the M4 footpaths — trees being destroyed as fast as new ones are planted; 35 years of M4 bank growth demolished.

March/April 1986 — Lois Parker

A pair of swans exploring the M4 bridge eyot in mid-March — possibly nesting, but the site is flooded when the river is high and too accessible to children when low. Many hawthorns in leaf; sprays of blackthorn already white. Rooks busy nest-building. A Robin with an injured beak and a Blackbird with one leg still frequenting Harcourt Road gardens.

April/May 1986 — Lois Parker

The cob swan parading aggressively up and down, head low on raised wings, driving off smaller waterfowl. Coots in a running battle up to Monkey Island. Tufted Duck, Mallard and Great Crested Grebe also on the river. Young Rabbits plentiful; Pheasants so tame they came into back gardens. A Sallow Kitten moth and Brimstone moth found in the light trap.

May/June 1986 — Lois Parker

Trees now in full leaf — shades of green from bright lime to silvery aspen; some sycamore saplings with deep wine-hued new leaves. Bluebell and quince blossoms described. Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler both present. When clearing out an old wood store, a wood mouse (or yellow-necked mouse) emerged.

June/July 1986 — Lois Parker

Returned from holiday to a flaming June — Marguerites, Buttercups, red Poppies, pink Clover and Mallow, yellow Hawk's Beard, creamy Elder blossom, Dog Roses. Goat's Beard in greater numbers this summer. Forget-me-nots and Celery-leaved Water Crowfoot. A Sparrowhawk described.

July/August 1986 — Lois Parker

Two interesting sightings: a Tawny Owl perched at the top of a small dead elm sapling near Clime's Corner (normally harassed by Rooks and Magpies in daytime; Kestrel joins in but then beats a hasty retreat). Young owls so large that both parents were needed to meet their food requirements. Boar Badger sighting in broad daylight near Clime's Corner.

August/September 1986 — Lois Parker

August already showing signs of autumn — berries ripening, yellow leaves falling in a breeze. Canada Geese flying regularly into fields near Marsh Lane to glean. Corn Marigolds re-found near Oak Stubbs — thought to have died out of the area. Greater Dodder confirmed — small patch, climbing, leafless with tiny pink flowers, parasitising nettles and hops.

September/October 1986 — Lois Parker

Leaves turning overnight. St Martin's Summer brought butterflies back — Speckled Woods seen for the first time in the season in the garden and along river banks. A Pygmy Shrew found dead — Britain's smallest mammal, weighing less than a 10p piece.

October/November 1986 — Lois Parker

Thames waters very low in mid-October — barely moving, carrying its autumn burden of fallen leaves. Bright yellow chestnut leaves. A few frosts warning hedgehogs to hibernate. No rabbits on Dorney Common since Myxomatosis struck — mentioned in passing. A Starling roost near the railway — thousands arriving in skeins, wheeling and swooping.

1987 | Lois Parker — includes Great Storm of October 1987

10 articles from 1987_combined.txt. Includes the famous Great Storm article and notable rare bird sightings.

December/January 1986/87 — Lois Parker

A Great Northern Diver on the lake near the Bath Road and Taplow railway bridge for several days — as large as a goose, dull dark greyish-brown in winter plumage. A female Goldeneye also present — a rare sighting locally.

January/February 1987 — Lois Parker

Nine days of snow and bitter cold followed by a milder spell. Large flock of immigrant Starlings on the river — Bill Parker's walks productive for bird sightings. Cow Parsley and Hemlock pushed up leaves from autumn and withstood icy conditions.

February/March 1987 — Lois Parker

A friend (amateur ornithologist) saw a Lapland Bunting and a Short-toed Lark on the north side of Dorney Common — both very rare visitors. Bill Parker spotted a Slavonian Grebe on the river towards Boveney — not a common occurrence; winter plumage black and white with black cap over red eyes.

March/April 1987 — Lois Parker

By mid-March trees tipped with green and Blackthorn in bloom. Alder catkins at their red and gold best. Hazel catkins shedding pale gold powder. Fat pussy willow catkins burst into bright yellow flower. Black Poplars gleaming yellow-green in the sun. Two pairs of swans nesting near the M4 bridge eyot.

April/May 1987 — Lois Parker

Mid-April — pinkish copper new leaves on Black Poplars glistening in the sun. Fat bumble bees buzzing. Purple Ground Ivy everywhere — once used in making ale ('ivy ale'). Blackthorn and Alder catkins; Toad and Hedgehog emergence.

June/July 1987 — Lois Parker

Eyed Hawk Moth in the light trap in mid-June — brownish upper wings and under-wings with splashes of pink and eye-like black and white circles. The Netted Pug moth also arrived — not

previously found in the trap, with an attractive spider's-web pattern. Green and black caterpillar found. Bill Parker's light trap records being submitted to the Nature Conservancy Council.

July/August 1987 — Lois Parker

Mid-July, high summer. Copper Beeches a rich deep auburn. White Willows gleaming in sunshine and glistening in rain. St Swithin's Day broke the hot sunny weather. A settled, slower life for many creatures — food plentiful, young fending for themselves.

August/September 1987 — Lois Parker

Wild Arum berries, Mountain Ash berries and Yew berries already bright scarlet. Bramble flowers and ripe blackberries. Dart moths in the light trap.

September/October 1987 — Lois Parker

September 17th — a perfect autumn morning, the river smooth as silk, mist, then sun breaking through. Keats's 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' invoked. Signs of true autumn: Swallows massing on wires before departure; first fieldfares from Scandinavia; Redwings stripping hedgerow berries.

October/November 1987 — Lois Parker (GREAT STORM)

During the early hours of Friday 16th October, Southern England was hit by a hurricane the like of which had not been experienced since 1704. Many lovely trees fell. Native deciduous trees will not be easily replaced as they can take 200 years to reach maturity. The fierce wind, frosts and dampness had driven most of the colour from leaves. Lois catalogues damage to local trees and the ecological aftermath.

1988 | Lois Parker + David Paxton (one column)

10 articles from 1988_combined.txt. David Paxton contributes the February/March column. Format now clearly bimonthly, with year dates added to headings.

November/December 1987 (pub. 1988) — Lois Parker

Chinese Muntjac (Barking Deer) seen in the vicinity of Boveney — small, easily hidden, gives a raucous bark when disturbed. Introduced to Britain in the 1900s as a park deer, now feral in many parts. Bright foxy-red in summer, olive-brown in winter.

December/January 1987/88 — Lois Parker

Mild days from mid-December into the New Year. Lapwings in the meadows in good numbers — pleasing as last winter they were few. Several flowers unaffected by weather: Daisies, Oxford Ragwort, Black Horehound (nettle family). Traveller's Joy climbing to over 30 feet on riverside trees.

January/February 1988 — Lois Parker

Mild weather bringing squirrels temporarily out of hibernation. Some hawthorn bushes quite green with new leaf. Increase in Peewits (Lapwings); Fieldfares, Redwings and Goldfinches plentiful. Traveller's Joy now Old Man's Beard having climbed to over 30 feet.

February/March 1988 — David Paxton

Guest column by David Paxton (the only such contribution in the archive). Wild Plum blossom beginning to drop in mid-February. White Dead Nettle, Speedwell and Celandines appearing. March Moth and several other early moths in the light trap including the Double Dart and Hebrew Character. Ash and Elm (where surviving) blossoms described.

March/April 1988 — Lois Parker

New yellow-green willow leaves against tall Black Poplars bearing gold catkins turning crimson. Chestnut leaves bursting from sticky buds. Hawthorns advanced enough for blossom by 1st May.

April/May 1988 — Lois Parker

Early spring: fuzzy bronze clusters of Ash, coppery Wych Elm flowers, long Sycamore tassels. Satiny rust-pink new Black Poplar leaves. Beech in tender green. Lords and Ladies (*Arum maculatum*) in evidence.

May/June 1988 — Lois Parker

Warm weather brought out myriads of butterflies — all usual species plus an unusual Painted Lady in the garden and by the river. Reed Warblers seen putting finishing touches to their nest. Canada Geese nesting behind one of the eyots. Dance of the Mayflies described — larvae in water for 2 years, adult life only 24 hours.

June/July 1988 — Lois Parker

A Jay came into the garden for the first time. A Kestrel alighted on the fence — probably after mice or fledglings. Mice increased this year, frequently seen scurrying in the garden. Spotted Flycatchers fairly often in garden.

August/September 1988 — Lois Parker

Spotted Flycatchers in the garden; Robin's nest found while cutting hedge. Pair of Bullfinches flew in, settled on the clothes line, appeared to be quarrelling, then flew swiftly away.

October/November 1988 — Lois Parker

Good crop of fungi in mild October: Wood Blewits (blueish-lilac stem when young); The Miller (*Clitophlus prunulus* — very small, yellow-fawn with ragged cap edges); *Clitocybe flaccida* (orange-tan, funnel-shaped exposing gills). Many butterflies still flying in the warm October.

1989 | Lois Parker

10 articles from 1989_combined.txt. Very rich year — notable sightings including Waxwings, Grey Wagtail, a new fungus find, and the Brindled Green moth.

November/December 1988 (pub. Jan 1989) — Lois Parker

Large numbers of Fieldfares — possibly a sign of hard winter ahead? Barnacle Geese at Slimbridge arriving earlier than usual. A friend brought in moths flying in the house — the Brick moth and others. Bill Parker's light trap active year-round.

December/January 1988/89 — Lois Parker

A mild December keeping hedgehogs out of hibernation. Waxwings seen by Bill Parker in the vicinity of Huntercombe — a Bird Watching Society was keeping watch on them with long-range cameras. Seven inches long, partial migrants from Scandinavia — pretty birds with characteristic silky crests.

January/February 1989 — Lois Parker

Mild weather continuing. Hedgehog still not hibernated in mid-January, apparently not having grown. Violets and several Hawthorn bushes in bloom; others in leaf. Some birds (probably Robins) commencing nest-building. Beefsteak Fungus on a tree stump — bracket-shaped, resembling steak when cut, oozing a reddish juice.

February/March 1989 — Lois Parker

A flock of ~100 Fieldfares in surrounding fields. Grey Wagtails seen near the Thames — a first mention for this species in the columns. Banks and hedgerows fresh with new growth — Cow Parsley and Lords and Ladies to one foot high.

March/April 1989 — Lois Parker

Cold and windy from the third week in March until Easter Saturday, then milder. March went out like a lamb with two hot sunny days. Over-wintering butterflies seen: Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Yellow Brimstone, Holly Blue. Early Thorn moth in the light trap.

April/May 1989 — Lois Parker

New fresh leaves — tender green of Beech and Lime; pinkish copper of Black Poplars glistening before blending into darker summer greens. Lords and Ladies pale green sheaths against very dark arrow-shaped leaves. Summer Snowflake mentioned — a rare plant previously noted in the 1970s Brock columns.

May/June 1989 — Lois Parker

Warm May followed by bitterly cold start to June. Heron still paying visits to neighbouring gardens looking for goldfish. Starlings nesting under the gutters — brood of noisy young as large as parents, forever clamouring to be fed. A peculiar fungus found on a tree stump near Amerden Priory — Lois describes it but cannot identify it.

July/August 1989 — Lois Parker

Golden St John's Wort nearly over. Traveller's Joy coming into cream bloom. Pink Great Willowherb mingling with Purple Loosestrife and giant White Convolvulus by the river. Wild Parsnip plentiful — flat mustard-coloured heads standing out against the dull white of Wild Carrot. Many House Martins clinging to house walls.

July/August 1989 — Lois Parker (moths continued)

Brindled Green moth in the light trap — comes rarely; green is predominant on the wings. Caterpillar bores into an oak bud to feed, then spins young leaves around itself, later feeding openly. The moth appears in August and September.

October/November 1989 — Lois Parker

Autumn leaves falling quickly. Great Tits pecked at seeds on giant sunflower heads but did not stay long — not to their taste. A brood of young Starlings still in the guttering in mid-October. A Red Admiral in the garden on 24th October. Bill found an unusual small bright green spider with a distinctive body pattern — not previously seen in the garden.

1990 | Lois Parker

7 articles reconstructed from Lois Parker bylines (OCR variant headings prevented standard extraction). A full year recovered.

January — Lois Parker

Goldcrests seen on the edge of the Queen's Eyot — Britain's smallest bird, very pretty. Large numbers of gulls on the eyot and on overhead wires, greatly annoyed when a Cormorant flew along the river towards them and landed amongst them seemingly unmoved by the raucous screeching. Litter in heaps near the towpath left by receding floodwaters noted.

Feb/Mar — Lois Parker

Common Inkcap fungi on the Vicarage lawn in the mild weather. Mildest February of the century, paid for by a bad storm. Small Tortoiseshell butterfly overwintered, came into garden on exceptionally warm, sunny 12th March. A pair of Mistle Thrushes going through courting routine — female appearing to drive male away before relenting. Green Woodpeckers frequently seen at Lake End.

March/April — Lois Parker

M4 rookery flourishing — 32 nests, 10 up on last year. Treecreepers and Great Spotted Woodpecker visiting gardens in Dorney Reach. Goldfinches returning. Yellowhammer seen in Old Marsh Lane (unusual) — Yellow Brimstone butterfly flying near it. 6th April: biting east wind bruised blossoms but sycamore flowers and rusty pink of elm unaffected. Three swans seen on Dorney Common — two holding up traffic in the road, drivers patiently waiting.

April/May — Lois Parker

Comma butterfly came into the garden. First dragonfly of year — blue and black *Agria splendens*. Lapwings nesting in fields along Marsh Lane, trying to drive off anyone walking along the footpath. A Swallow seen in Dorney village. Lone Swan in field by Oak Stubbs Cottages — in mourning; dead mate found during ploughing.

May/June — Lois Parker

Jay came into garden for first time. Kingfisher seen again. Four cygnets on river with parents — cob angrily patrolling, casting suspicious eye on Canada Geese nesting in the reed bed by Monkey Island. Swans will tolerate ducks nesting near them but never geese. A young rook found in drive, too weak to fly; parents calling frantically from a roof opposite. Earth so dry that worms had gone deep — dug in six places without finding any.

July/Aug — Lois Parker

Two recent hurricanes killing off trees — Alders and White Willows particularly affected; a large patch of brambles by the M4 footpath now dead. Great Mullein growing well along M4 — tall

plant with long spike of tall yellow flowers and furry grey leaves; once it self-seeds in a garden it stays forever. Toadflax and bright blue Chicory also along M4 footpath.

August/September — Lois Parker

Wasp attacking a small green caterpillar, stinging it into unconsciousness to eat. Good strong plant of Bur Marigold found not far from Bray Lock — yellow flowers as big as a buttercup, small collar of tiny leaves; not seen in the area before. Crimson Underwing moth flew into the house — large moth; brown upper wings, bright crimson underwings, a striking insect. Despite drought, large horse mushrooms in garden. Skeins of Canada Geese flying over as sign of autumn.

1991 | Lois Parker

10 articles from 1991_combined.txt. Rich year — good breeding season noted despite the cold June.

January/February 1991 — Lois Parker

Rooks now coming to the bird table — amusing antics; sitting along a fence like business executives at a conference or squabbling on a TV aerial. Many Fieldfares in meadows surrounding Dorney village. Large numbers of Long Tailed Tits. Yellow Wagtail seen again in Harcourt Road. Pied Wagtails bolder in cold weather; adult with black cap, last year's brood with grey cap. White Wagtail arrives from the Continent.

December/January 1990/91 — Lois Parker

Cygnets nearly fully grown, parents about to drive them off. Many Fieldfares and Goldfinches. Small group of Bramblings along M4 footpath. Heron perched at very top of fir tree next door — inspecting neighbouring ponds for goldfish. Squirrels running along hawthorn branches eating berries. Jack in the Hedge in bloom. Wood Blewits, Many-zoned Polypore at tree base in Harcourt Road, and Pholiota Sylvatica found. Great Spotted Woodpecker coming to feed.

February/March 1991 — Lois Parker

19 nests surviving in M4 rookery. Rooks losing their nests try to steal from luckier comrades — much noise and fighting. Fox and Nuthatch seen in gardens in Dorney Reach. Three swans seen on Dorney Common (one on the brook, two in the road holding up traffic). Two pairs of swans by M4 bridge. Foxes on the increase — reported as having a 'lean and hungry look' during the cold weather.

March/April 1991 — Lois Parker

Winter visitors departed by mid-March. First spring butterfly: Yellow Brimstone male. Goldcrests seen around the Vicarage. Green Woodpecker flew by near the church. Nightingale heard singing in a garden in Harcourt Road in late March — same garden visited by Mallards. Wood Mouse found dead in the road; Long-tailed Mouse on doorstep. Wood Anemone found the previous year produced four blooms.

April/May 1991 — Lois Parker

Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillar found in garden — interesting brown but the moth will be in shades of brown, olive green and pink. Young Magpie trying to build a nest alone in a small conifer at Clime's Corner — using 4-foot sticks that kept dislodging, eventually succeeded with shorter sticks. Still no mate. Cuckoo heard several times. Eight ducklings with mother near M4 bridge.

May/June 1991 — Lois Parker

Collar Doves nested in bullace plum tree. Goldfinches nesting in a bush in a garden near the M4 — traffic noise doesn't worry them. Goldfinches usually nest at end of a branch or occasionally in hedges. Ducks flying around and alighting on a rooftop — rooks couldn't stand the raucous quacking and eventually departed. Wood mouse nest found under a board in garden — beautifully woven with feathers and wadding. Pale blue Lamb's Lettuce plentiful this year.

June/July 1991 — Lois Parker

Fox visiting garden — detectable by its sour, feral smell. Collar Doves have two young almost as large as themselves. Blackbirds nesting in the clematis on the shed. Pair of swans in Dorney Reach with four cygnets; another with three. Many Bullfinches around. Magpie that had been nesting alone acquired a mate — but one later died. By mid-July Toadflax, Lady's Bedstraw, Wild Carrot, Scabious and purple Knapweed in bloom.

July/August 1991 — Lois Parker

Large brown dragonfly came into the garden. Large number of young Starlings and parents raiding early bullace plums — a bad breeding season for some birds but not Starlings which survive any weather. Vivid blue Chicory, crimson Knapweed and mauve Scabious brightening banks and hedges.

August/September 1991 — Lois Parker

Flat seed heads of Hemlock looked attractive in late summer. Wall Lettuce also doing well. Buddleia covered with Painted Ladies, Commas, Yellow Brimstones, Peacocks, Gatekeepers, Red Admirals, Small Tortoiseshells and Large Whites. Wood and Horse Mushrooms in garden and, to Lois's surprise, a Giant Puffball. Kestrel attacked a Wood Pigeon — startled by Bill Parker and lost grip; struck again successfully.

October/November 1991 — Lois Parker

St Luke's Summer — right conditions for a good crop of fungi: Field, Wood and Horse Mushrooms, Blewits, Common and Shaggy Inkcaps (Lawyer's Wig) and *Lactaria amethystina* (violet coloured, most attractive in groups). Inkcaps auto-digestion described. Hedgehog in hibernation found in garden rubbish heap — carefully covered and left. Ring Ouzel reported coming into a garden in Harcourt Road — sure it was not a pied Blackbird.

1992 | Lois Parker

12 articles from 1992_combined.txt. Notable records: Ring-necked Parakeets established in Dorney; Dartford Warbler at Sewage Farm; Hobby near M4 bridge; Quail on Sewage Farm.

November/December 1991 (pub. 1992) — Lois Parker

Oxford Ragwort, Yarrow and Groundsel persisting. Fieldfares along M4 footpath alongside a Green Woodpecker. Wren folklore described — Roman gods protected them; St Stephen's Day boys hunted wrens. Hummingbird Hawk Moth seen in a garden in Harcourt Road — first sighting of this species in the area. Brown upper wings crossed with black and orange underwings.

December/January 1991/92 — Lois Parker

Parakeets (Ring-necked/Green) seen in gardens in Dorney Reach — one visited on 8th December, eating lime tree seeds and pink laburnum pods, holding the pod in its claw and tearing out the seeds. Not known where these birds escaped from but they had been in the area for several years. Dartford Warbler seen on the Sewage Farm at Dorney — had been there eight weeks; a rare visit from this shy bird.

January/February 1992 — Lois Parker

Robins courting, Blackbirds fighting over territory. Fieldfares in large numbers. Scarlet Yew berries. Pochards on river near M4 bridge; rookery has 14 surviving nests. Parakeets still frequent visitors — they slide down the wire of the nut-holder to reach the nuts. Female Brambling came into the garden — unusual sighting.

February/March 1992 — Lois Parker

Some fungi survived the winter — small bracket type with curly edges in yellow, orange, green and grey. Violets, pink and white Dead Nettle, Dandelions and Daisies in bloom by end of February. A mouse nest disturbed in the fuchsias — two tiny young present; mild weather so they probably won't need to rebuild. By end of first week, trees bearing catkins at their best along the river banks.

March/April 1992 — Lois Parker

Blackthorns in bloom; carpets of Celandines. Swinecress, Oxford Ragwort and Shepherd's Purse. Peacock butterfly in garden; Small Tortoiseshell overwintering found behind a wardrobe. Dorney lost marks in Best Kept Village Competition because of ivy round bus shelters — Lois defends the ivy (Wrens nest in it). Frog spawn in a pond; 15 Siskins near M4 bridge (greenfinch-like but smaller).

April/May 1992 — Lois Parker

Hawthorns, Horse Chestnuts in bloom at Easter. Purple Ground Ivy, Lamb's Lettuce, Jack-in-the-Hedge, Oxford Ragwort. Heron took 29 fish from a pond in Harcourt Road. Chaffinch nest with clutch of eggs in same garden. Red Leg disease in frogs spreading from Kent — Lois urges pond owners to cut back branches to let in more light. Lords and Ladies described in detail.

May/June 1992 — Lois Parker

Many early summer flowers in the warm May: Yellow Lady Slipper, Smooth Hawk's Beard, Hop Trefoil, Pink Clover, Dog Roses, Fumitory, White Hemlock, Marguerites, Red Poppies, Blue Meadow Cranesbill. Barn Owl seen at Amerden — a rare sight. Hornets reported in the area — nearest previous sighting was Windsor Great Park, described as unwelcome guests in lofts and bane of beekeepers. Blue Tits nesting in wall of the church.

June/July 1992 — Lois Parker

Blackberry blossom covering large areas of brambles in mid-June. Mauve Scabious, blue Chicory, yellow St John's Wort and Lady's Bedstraw. Pyramidal Orchid found in Trumper's Field. A Quail seen on Dorney Sewage Farm — most unusual. Two Hobbies near the M4 bridge at the Marsh Lane end. Swallowtail Moth seen — pale primrose with two brown spots on lower wings. Fox cubs playing while vixen watched approvingly near M4 bridge.

July/August 1992 — Lois Parker

Traveller's Joy and Salad Burnet in bloom. Water Vole seen at Trumper's Field area running across the road from one drain to another. Wild Carrot, Burnet Saxifrage, Salad Burnet blooming. Two Giant Puffballs in garden despite dry weather. Cabbage White caterpillars scraped off cabbages by the hundreds.

August/September 1992 — Lois Parker

Blackberries ripe; Lord's and Ladies scarlet berries making bright splashes. Black Poplars leaves turning yellow. Chiffchaff made a brief visit — never seen in the garden before. Giant Puffballs, Fairy Ring Toadstools, Wood Mushrooms. Peahen arrived in a garden in Harcourt Road — laid three eggs before being killed by a fox weeks later. Small Toad, no larger than a thumbnail, disturbed while weeding.

September/October 1992 — Lois Parker

Sulphur Yellow Polypore on a tree trunk — growing in tiers, bright yellow-orange on top, gold and spongy underneath. Dryad's Saddles — flat, brown, white and scaly. Badgers digging up a lawn in Old Marsh Lane searching for worms — rain had softened earth and brought worms to surface. Great Spotted Woodpecker at Clime's Corner — surprised Lois by flying in front of her while cycling.

October/November 1992 — Lois Parker

Autumn colours spoiled by rain. Good crop of Horse Chestnuts ignored by children (no open fires for roasting Sweet Chestnuts). Violets and Wall Lettuce blooming out of season. White Chamomile. Magpies very bold — standing in middle of road reluctant to move for cars. A pair defying the cat.

1993 | Lois Parker

13 articles from 1993_combined.txt. Notable: Dartford Warbler returned; Fox and Cubs / Orange Hawkweed found; Red Kite fighting Tawny Owl reported; Hemlock plants reaching 10 feet.

Nov/Dec 1992 (pub. 1993) — Lois Parker

Large patches of Daisies appearing in grass. Hedgehog walked into scullery overnight — apparently hibernated there under something. A few Redwings arrived. Two Jays coming regularly into a friend's garden. Sparrowhawk visited — stripped feathers from kill then flew elsewhere to eat.

December/January 1992/93 — Lois Parker

Green Parakeets visiting garden; Long Tailed Tits in briefly. Kestrel tried to catch a Blue Tit in a dense mass of bush twigs — the density of branches prevented the strike. Spindle Tree discovered at the lower end of Old Marsh Lane — bright pink berries visible now leaves had fallen. The four-lobed seed capsules split to cast out four orange seeds. Hard wood historically used for making spindles.

January/February 1993 — Lois Parker

Dartford Warbler returned to the Sewage Farm by Dorney Common. A flock of Lapwings flying over the area. Weasel spotted in Marsh Lane. Leaves of Lords and Ladies and Cow Parsley now 6 inches high. Celandines blooming by the first week in January — earliest Lois had ever

seen them; Cow Parsley flowers by the second week in February (unusually early). First Coltsfoot usually first to appear.

February/March 1993 — Lois Parker

Level of river lowered considerably — flows with scarcely a ripple. Squirrels stripped much bark from the Alders — mild winter brought them out of hibernation early. Blue Speedwell and Cow Parsley bloomed early. A pair of Tufted Duck near M4 bridge; drake with three females and last year's youngster at Bray Lock. Sparrowhawk came to a bird table in Harcourt Road — scarce in the area. Kestrel frequently seen on posts and trees around Clime's Corner. Rooks commenced nest-building before St Valentine's Day. 13 nests in M4 rookery.

March/April 1993 — Lois Parker

Long walk by the river towards Boveney in mid-March — many purple and white Violets in bloom; Lapwings swooping and calling in nearby fields. A Rook unable to fly found. Now 22 nests in M4 rookery, one in a tree not used for many years. Hedgehogs out of hibernation. Coal Tit came into garden when Starlings absent. Bramblings seen by M4 footpath.

April/May 1993 — Lois Parker

Cuckoo heard. Summer Snowflake seen — growing in a most unusual place in a gravel path away from the river, suggesting deliberate planting. Long Tailed Tits and Goldfinches frequent visitors. Tiny Yellow Brimstones, Small Whites and usual Peacocks. Orange-tip butterflies appeared.

June/July 1993 — Lois Parker

Yellow St John's Wort, Lady's Bedstraw, white Camomile, blue Chicory, pink Blackberry blossom by mid-June. Hemlock flourishing — some plants 10 feet high; thick stems with purple streaks; flowers similar to Cow Parsley. New plant found by M4 footpath: Hawkweed Oxeye — 3 feet tall, yellow flowers like a small dandelion. Lammas leaves on trees that had been severely lopped in Harcourt Road. Moles taken up residence in some gardens, spoiling lawns. A sparrow carried off a loose washer from a conservatory roof.

July/August 1993 — Lois Parker

Elephant Hawk Moth seen (another). First Red Admiral and Speckled Wood butterflies of the year. Wild Carrot, Wild Parsnip and Burnet Saxifrage in bloom. Many frogs and young toads in garden from a neighbour's pond. Fox marking territory with unpleasant odour. Bryony showing red berries, Purple Nightshade berries, Lords and Ladies orange/scarlet seed pods.

August/September 1993 — Lois Parker

Water Rails seen some distance away — olive brown upper parts, blue-grey sides, flanks prominently barred black and white. Woolly Bear caterpillars found — Tiger Moths on the way. Willow Beauty Moth came into the house — pretty lacy patterns in varying shades of grey and brown. Red Underwing Moth found dead along M4 footpath — probably hit by traffic; frequent in areas with willows and poplars as caterpillars feed on their leaves.

September/October 1993 — Lois Parker

Orange Hawkweed (*Hieracium aurantiacum* / Fox and Cubs) found growing in a field — not seen in the area before; originally a garden escapee now established as a wild flower. Grows 6-12 inches high; reddish-orange bloom clusters with blackish hairs on stem (hence 'Grim the

Collier' in the North). Tawny Owl and a bird of prey fighting in someone's garden in Eton Wick — the bird of prey probably a Red Kite recently released near Henley.

October/November 1993 — Lois Parker

Oaks and Limes bright yellow; Sycamores gold, russet and crimson. Common Inkcap, Shaggy Inkcap (Lawyer's Wig) and Parasol Mushroom. Wild Violets began blooming again. Early November St Martin's Summer brought Red Admirals, Small Tortoiseshells and Yellow Brimstone. Bill found six mouse nests in a clematis — beautifully made with silvery, yellow balls of fluff.

1994 | Lois Parker

13 articles from 1994_combined.txt. Notable: Ring-necked Parakeets now on British Birds list; Red Kite seen hovering near M4; Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers at Weir Bank Island; 20 Bee Orchids in Trumper's Field; Summer Snowflake by M4 bridge.

November/December 1993 (pub. 1994) — Lois Parker

M4 rookery nests visible again with leaf covering fallen — two new nests in a tall willow as chestnuts were full. Rooks roosting elsewhere at night (not in rookery). Five Lapwings along Barge Path — not visited in large numbers for some years. Large numbers of Fieldfares in meadows at same venue. Groups of Goldfinches, Long Tailed Tits and Wrens. Blackcap in garden — many now spending winter here. Redwings also present.

December/January 1993/94 — Lois Parker

Palm appearing on Sallow Willows by third week in December; hawthorns with new leaves and flowers in bloom. Lords and Ladies leaves four inches high. Female Blackcap in garden; Collar Doves coming daily for seeds. Wine-coloured alder catkins well developed.

January/February 1994 — Lois Parker

Two Rooks repairing the one remaining nest in M4 rookery willow in mid-January — a month before St Valentine's Day. 10 nests remain in chestnut trees. Mild days brought squirrels and hedgehogs out of hibernation. Red Kite seen hovering near the M4 — a remarkable sighting. Along the Barge Path: six Canada Geese, Wrens, Long Tailed Tits, two Ring-necked Parakeets, and the remains of a Partridge. Six mice in a shared nest under a wheelbarrow. A toad in garden rubbish in the skip.

February/March 1994 — Lois Parker

Ring-necked Parakeets visiting garden again — now on the official British Birds list. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers coming to a garden by the river for nuts — they nest on Weir Bank Island and bring their young when old enough. Song Thrush and Mistle Thrush both decreasing; Lois advises placing a large stone in garden to serve as anvil for thrushes cracking snails. Starlings excluding smaller birds from feeders.

March/April 1994 — Lois Parker

Windy month, blossoms blown off blackthorns. Coltsfoot blooming in Marsh Lane — relieved that clearance work had not disturbed them. 24 nests in M4 rookery. Robin with injured beak and Blackbird with one leg still in Harcourt Road gardens. Yellow Brimstones and Peacocks appeared. Nuthatches and Tree Creepers in gardens along river. M4 bank growth of 35 years

demolished — elms gone, limes gone. Starlings nesting from lamb's wool floating down from roof.

April/May 1994 — Lois Parker

Orange-tip, Common Blue and Holly Blue butterflies seen. Summer Snowflake seen by the M4 bridge — the vegetation round it had been cut, exposing it, in an obscure enough position to remain. Many Orange Tip butterflies. A wild bees' nest dug out by a badger in the bank of the meadow by the M4 Marsh Lane bridge. 20 Bee Orchids seen in Trumper's Field.

May/June 1994 — Lois Parker

M4 footpath clearance now well covered — Buttercups, Marguerites, Poppies, Clover, Lady Slipper, Blue Alkanet, Wood Sorrel, Tufted Vetch, Bryony, Yarrow, Treacle Mustard. Yellow Iris by the river. Dog Roses. Elder bushes with creamy flower heads. Two more mouse nests in Clematis Tangutica — built high up to avoid predators, beautifully woven.

June/July 1994 — Lois Parker

Few butterflies due to cold weather earlier. Flowers of high summer: Knapweed, Lady's Bedstraw, Chicory, St John's Wort, Toadflax, Scabious, Blue Meadow Cranesbill — owing to rigorous M4 cut-back only one plant of Meadow Cranesbill remains. 20 Bee Orchids in Trumper's Field again (confirmed). Burnet Moths resting on Scabious — 5 or 6 spot unclear. Magpie Moths and Brimstone Moths in garden. One Painted Lady. Swallowtail Moth.

July/August 1994 — Lois Parker

Numerous butterflies despite hot weather: Painted Lady, Small Heath, Gatekeeper, Green Veined White plus the usual species. Two small yellow and black Longhorn Beetles in garden. Wren making loud clicking sounds in bush — warning off a cat. Swallowtail Moth. Three Common Blue butterflies seen — Common Blue becoming uncommon. First Canada Geese skein flying over — sign of autumn. Lords and Ladies berries changing to vermilion.

August/September 1994 — Lois Parker

Silver Y Moths and Orange Underwing moths flying out of bedding plants when watered. Starlings increased alarmingly — three groups of over 100. Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillars — large, brown, described in detail. Common Carpet Moth found in hall. Ringed Neck Parakeets seen by river in good numbers. Great Spotted Woodpecker in next-door garden. Water Wagtails hopping about in various places.

September/October 1994 — Lois Parker

Conkers brought down by windy weather. Two Giant Puffballs in garden. Fairy Ring Toadstools. Comma and Tortoiseshell butterflies in garden. Common Carpet Moth. Traveller's Joy turning into Old Man's Beard. Autumn Hawkbit plentiful; Yarrow, White Dead Nettle, Hogweed, Wild Carrot and Oxford Ragwort blooming into winter.

October/November 1994 — Lois Parker

Best autumn colours in mid-October. Goldfinches and several Grey Wagtails. Kingfishers seen along the Cut by Bill Parker. Two Rooks trying to rob a Starling of bread — clumsy tactics; flew away when more Starlings arrived. Parasol Mushrooms and Lawyer's Wig. Bats mating in autumn; fertilised ova remaining dormant in female until mid-winter. Badgers also mate now —

fertilised ova float until mid-winter before implantation. Many Long Tailed Tits by river and M4 footpath.

1995 | Lois Parker

11 articles from 1995_combined.txt. Notable: mildest November for 335 years; Lesser Broomrape found; Slow Worm 3 feet long; Muntjac deer south of M4; Spring Snowflake blooming; Yellow Hammer in Marsh Lane.

November/December 1994 (pub. 1995) — Lois Parker

Mildest November for 335 years — many wild flowers continuing to bloom, Hawthorns producing flowers. Redwings and Fieldfares not yet arrived — their native lands still mild. Colourful species visible: Green Woodpecker, Jays, Long Tailed Tits, Goldfinches and Water Wagtails. Lesser Broomrape found and identified in a friend's garden — parasitic plant on roots of pea family plants. Pale yellowish and dark wine flowers on a spike; lacks chlorophyll. Flat Polyporus along Barge Path, yellowish.

December/January 1994/95 — Lois Parker

Small violet-grey toadstool in a plant pot; rust-coloured toadstools on tree stumps. A large Boletus subtomentosus identified by Bill — dark brown cap cracking in places, yellow spongy underside instead of gills; Boleti often change colour when cut. Large female hedgehog visiting regularly; a smaller one came in December — so tiny its survival chances seemed slim, but it kept coming and gaining weight. Mild weather giving way to hard frosts on 14th December — Long grasses, Teasels, Hemlock seed heads, twigs and spider's webs festooned with frost.

January/February 1995 — Lois Parker

First Celandine of the year on 28th January — very early. Sparrow chased a Collar Dove out of the sycamore tree. Large group of Fieldfares in a meadow in Marsh Lane. Crow with many white wing feathers seen among them — unusual. Great Spotted Woodpecker seen several times in Dorney Reach gardens. First Celandine in late January also notable. Two Toads hibernating in garden rubbish, one not fully grown — carefully moved.

February/March 1995 — Lois Parker

17 nests surviving in M4 rookery. Green Woodpecker seen near M4. Little Owl in Marsh Lane. Seven Herons in one meadow nearby in peculiar manner — courting dance (unusual for so many at once). Silver catkins of Sallow Willows appearing. Flowers blooming all winter: Red and White Dead Nettle, Chickweed, Shepherd's Purse, Groundsel, Oxford Ragwort and some Cow Parsley.

March/April 1995 — Lois Parker

Wet winter caused several lakes to appear on Dorney Common — swans found it a quiet place. Sunny days brought out Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. Hedgehogs out of hibernation; frogs in garden ponds ready to mate. Fieldfares gathered near Bray Lock before departure. 23 nests in M4 rookery, slight increase. Large hatching of Ladybirds this year.

April/May 1995 — Lois Parker

Lords and Ladies, Jack in the Hedge, purple Ground Ivy, Buttercups, blue Alkanet, Lamb's Lettuce in bloom by mid-April. Hawthorn blossom white; some Chestnut candles out. Spring

Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*) by M4 bridge confirmed in bloom — vegetation cut back had exposed it; in an obscure position, hopefully safe. Crafty Heron around again stealing fish.

May/June 1995 — Lois Parker

M4 footpath bank recovering after severe cutback two years ago — at least 20 species of flowers growing. Bristly Hawk's Beard abundant. Marguerites and Poppies returned. Epidemic of Red Leg disease in frogs. Blackberry bushes in bloom unusually early. Pink and white Dog Roses in bloom by third week in May. Cuckoo heard in May. Slow Worm three feet long seen in a garden in Harcourt Road — unusually large. Dragonfly *Agria splendens* in sunshine. Muntjac Deer seen south of M4 — this side of the motorway.

June/July 1995 — Lois Parker

Bright blue Chicory, Lady's Bedstraw, mauve Scabious, St John's Wort. St John's Day (23rd June) — people historically gathered St John's Wort and hung it round the house to ward off evil spirits. Sunnydays brought Skippers, Meadow Blues, Wall butterflies and Small Tortoiseshells. Dead Green Woodpecker found in gutter on M4 bridge — appeared to have been taken by a fox. Thrushes with a fledgeling in the sycamore — making a rasping warning sound, teaching it about cats.

August/September 1995 — Lois Parker

Many close-up sightings of Kestrels. Goldfinches in great numbers. Pair of swans on river with four almost fully-grown cygnets. Old Lady Moths seen on several occasions — large, attractively patterned in various shades of brown. Few Crows in the area — most large black birds are Rooks. Giant Puffball appeared in garden (second year). Canada Geese skeins flying over. Rain in September bringing flowers back into recovery.

September/October 1995 — Lois Parker

Green grass returning after drought. Toadflax and Bladder Campion still blooming. Sow Thistle, Fat Hen and Mugwort did well during hot summer. Giant Puffball in garden. Fairy Ring Toadstools. Canada Geese skeins — even honking heard at night. One swan and one cygnet on river (no sign of other parent). Painted Lady seen in a Harcourt Road garden — rare this year. Brownish-red dragonfly in garden. Squirrels busy collecting conkers. Some hedgehogs likely died in the drought.

October/November 1995 — Lois Parker

St Martin's Summer in October; brief St Luke's Summer at month's end. Horse Mushrooms, Field Mushrooms, Common Inkcaps, Shaggy Inkcaps (Lawyer's Wig). Another Giant Puffball found — too old (brown spores leaving it). Two Herald Moths found in the church — forewings purplish or grey-brown with red markings and orange specks. Goldfinches feeding on abundant seeds. Yellow Hammer seen by M4 footpath — unusual sighting. Spindle Tree re-located at end of Old Marsh Lane — had curled around an elder bush; only pink berries revealed it.

1996 | Lois Parker

11 articles from 1996_combined.txt. Notable: Wild Catmint found near river; Wild Crab Apple tree found on Barge Path; White Hairstreak butterflies; Roe Deer behind Harcourt Road; Yellowhammers confirmed in Marsh Lane; Dorney Bridge opened (new link over Thames).

November/December 1995 (pub. 1996) — Lois Parker

St Luke's Summer brought newly hatched Red Admirals into garden. Mild cold spell then Red Admirals again. Hawthorn bearing crimson haws with red and gold leaves AND producing blossom simultaneously. Wild Catmint found growing near the river — discovered by Bill. Grebes defending territory against Mallards and Coots. Wild Crab Apple Tree found along Barge Path — previously unnoticed; now identified by its fruit. December/January: Jack in the Hedge in flower despite mild weather.

January/February 1996 — Lois Parker

26th January: so many Redwings in the area they couldn't be counted. By 28th January most had gone elsewhere. 1st February: many Fieldfares appeared. Cormorant observed catching a fish in the river — not uncommon for Cormorants to frequent the river in winter. Leaves of Dock, Lords and Ladies and Cow Parsley growing apace underground.

February/March 1996 — Lois Parker

Snow and gale-force east winds. Fieldfares disappeared by 22nd February. 14 nests surviving in M4 rookery — Rooks repairing some. Blue Speedwell and Red Dead Nettle continued to bloom under the snow. Large amount of rubbish thrown down by M4 workmen spoiling the area. Birch catkins attractive with long pale gold catkins. Grey Wagtail seen near gate into Trumper's Field — unusual. Many Cormorants on Bray-side gravel pits.

March/April 1996 — Lois Parker

21 nests in M4 rookery, at least 8 pairs had to start new nests. Solitary Tufted Duck still by M4 bridge. Canada Geese pair sailing up and down as if seeking a nesting site — greatly annoying the Great Crested Grebes who regard this stretch of river as their territory. Kingfisher visiting a garden in Harcourt Road daily — unusual. Yellow Brimstone butterfly seen in mid-March. Coltsfoot in upper part of Marsh Lane. Cow Parsley first in bloom.

April/May 1996 — Lois Parker

Chestnuts and Hawthorns well into leaf. Black Poplars bearing shiny new pale coppery leaves. Spring Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*) found again near the M4 bridge — and another in a most unusual place, in a gravel path next to a garden some distance from the river, suggesting deliberate planting. Holly Blue butterfly. Many Yellow Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies. Young Toads in garden.

June/July 1996 — Lois Parker

Elder and Wayfaring bushes with creamy blossom. Pink Dog Roses and white Field Roses plentiful. Blue Meadow Cranesbill, Bladder Campion, Knapweed and Lady's Bedstraw in bloom. Tall Hemlocks massed along M4 footpath. Baby Blue Tits squeaky — 'titmice' explained. Young friendly Blackbird tapping on the hose for attention when Bill was watering. Clouded Yellow butterfly seen by Bill. Blue Damsel Flies and Dragonfly *Agria splendens* frequently in gardens. Crab Spiders on bushes.

July/August 1996 — Lois Parker

Wild Carrot and Parsnip, Meadowsweet, Purple Loosestrife, Scabious, Chicory and St John's Wort in bloom. Green and gold Damsel Fly in garden (different species from usual blue). Plenty of butterflies including Small Skippers, Meadow Browns, Holly Blues. Swallowtail Moth seen.

By end of July Teasels and Traveller's Joy in bloom. Two White Hairstreak butterflies in the garden — rare in this area.

August/September 1996 — Lois Parker

Toadflax in bloom (somewhat late). Tansies in flower along Amerden Lane. Heavy blackberry crop. Rowan berries already bright orange. Six Painted Ladies on buddleia at one time — year of the butterfly. Silver Y and Plume moths plentiful. Male Yellow Brimstone. 10 Long Tailed Tits in field by Oak Stubbs Lane — good breeding season. Hawthorns covered in crimson berries unusually early. Blackthorns heavy with sloes. Hops plentiful all along Marsh Lane.

September/October 1996 — Lois Parker

Hawthorn leaves turned red and gold; heavy crop of berries. Ash trees bearing plentiful keys. Spindle Bush at top of Marsh Lane with bright pink berries; elder purple berries. Large Ranunculus Moth found in porch — common in autumn; fawn hind wings, dark brown upper wings with attractive pattern. Yellowhammers still residing in Marsh Lane — confirmed present. Roe Deer seen by several people in field behind Harcourt Road (not school side); photograph taken; Roe Deer not native to this part of the country.

November 1996 — Lois Parker

Spindle Tree in Old Marsh Lane doing well (noted with pleasure). Many Long Tailed Tits in garden on several occasions. Lawyer's Wig toadstools appeared. Violets still blooming. Small variety Puffballs appeared in the grass. A pair of Pheasants crossing the road on the Marsh Lane bridge — male apparently called to the female to go back, both retreated safely. Many Yew berries this year. Red Admiral in garden on 5th November.

1997 | Lois Parker

12 articles from 1997_combined.txt. Notable: Worst drought since 1749 (April/May); Swan nesting at Boveney Lock; Dodder confirmed again in Marsh Lane; Stag Beetle sighted; 8 cygnets from Boveney nest raised then predated. Peter Tyler name appears — likely his 1997 involvement.

November/December 1996 (pub. 1997) — Lois Parker

Fieldfares appeared by mid-November — feeding on haws in M4 hedge. Goldfinches in large groups on seeds. Spindle Tree pink berries have burst and are ready to disperse seeds — two more Spindle Trees discovered nearby. The M4 hedge: mainly Hawthorn but also Blackthorn, Dogwood and Oak — and much Bramble, Ivy and Hops. Oak chopped to hedge height — a good tree wasted. Several fungi growing: Peziza catinus (fawn cup fungi), Laccaria amethystina (wholly violet), Clitocybe flaccida (cinnamon funnel cap).

December/January 1996/97 — Lois Parker

White Dead Nettle, Shepherd's Purse, Feverfew and Camomile still in bloom. Cow Parsley leaves 9 inches high. Hazel catkins well advanced. Plenty of Fieldfares and Redwings. Big freeze: Thames frozen at edges; Pied Wagtails in roads seeking food. 20 Tufted Ducks near M4 bridge (only one female). 10 Greenfinches in Marsh Lane; several Jays. Sparrowhawk near Marsh Lane — scarce. Green Woodpeckers appearing in gardens. A Sparrow with a feather in its beak in January — probably lining old nest for sleeping.

January/February 1997 — Lois Parker

Red berries of Purple Nightshade not withered despite severe frost. Celandine and Lords and Ladies leaves appearing; new lime twigs (wine colour). Male and female Blackcap seen separately in neighbours' gardens — used to migrate but milder winters encouraging them to stay. Green Woodpecker in Lois's garden for the first time — stayed some time finding food in grass and soil. 10 Tufted Duck near M4 bridge.

February/March 1997 — Lois Parker

'February fill dyke' lived up to its name. 13 nests remaining intact in M4 rookery despite fierce winds. Small buds on elder, sycamore, ash and blackthorn by mid-February. Silvery palm appearing. Hazel catkins standing up to inclement weather. Chickweed and Violets in bloom. By Mothering Sunday (mid-March): Celandines, Blue Speedwell, Creeping Speedwell. Many fresh green hawthorn leaves. Ladybirds, Bumble Bees and male Yellow Brimstones in sun — these had overwintered.

March/April 1997 — Lois Parker

By mid-March many trees in leaf; carpets of Celandines and Swinecress everywhere. Scarlet Pimpernel appeared. Black Poplars covered with red and yellow catkins. A male Kestrel perching in a large tree in a meadow in Marsh Lane — chasing off Crows with loud cries. More overwintering Tortoiseshells in garden. By first week in April Chestnut trees showing fresh green leaves; Hawthorn blossom appeared; purple Ground Ivy, Camomile and Jack in the Hedge.

April/May 1997 — Lois Parker (drought)

Mr and Mrs Gibson at Boveney Lock intrigued by a pair of swans which had built their nest nearby but in a position inconvenient for walkers — the Gibsons moved it to a better spot but the swans moved it back. Eight eggs laid; all hatched safely. Worst drought in this part of England since 1749. But sunshine brought large numbers of butterflies — Orange Tip, Brimstone, Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Large and Small White, many Holly Blue. Yellowhammers seen again in Marsh Lane.

May/June 1997 — Lois Parker

Early summer flowers: Wild Carrot, Purple Vetch, Meadow Cranesbill, Elder and Dog Rose. Less Meadow Cranesbill than usual — a bad sign. Reptiles plentiful: frogs, toads, slow-worms, grass snakes and possibly an adder all reported in gardens. Muntjac Deer came into a garden in Meadow Way. Goldfinches still in area; many Swifts. Blue Damsel Flies visiting gardens. Garden Carpet Moth in house. Small and Large Poppies in bloom by mid-May. Hemlock plants reaching 10 feet. News: the 8 cygnets from Boveney Lock — one has now been taken (probably by a fox).

June/July 1997 — Lois Parker

Bright blue Chicory, Lady's Bedstraw and St John's Wort in bloom. Male Hedgehog with badly grazed face — probably manhandled by fox or dog. Came back a week later looking better. Rare Stag Beetle seen. Water Wagtail with only one leg in Maidenhead High Street. Duck courting a drake without success. A duck and ducklings appearing in a Harcourt Road garden. Fledgeling Blackbirds rescued twice; parents attacked Lois with the cat in her arms.

July/August 1997 — Lois Parker

Comma and Brimstone butterflies more frequent in garden since more sunshine; Painted Ladies seldom appeared. Dark Arches Moth, Crimson Underwing (a large moth). Giant Puffball in garden again. Young snake 10 inches long and very thin found dead on garden path — mottled light green and black, dark brown underside. Possibly a cross between adder and grass snake. Teasels in bloom; large blackberry crop ripening early. Purple Nightshade with scarlet berries already.

August/September 1997 — Lois Parker

Female Hedgehog bringing a much smaller one to eat food left by the cat. Hedgehog fell into a neighbour's pond — rescued by towing water lily clump to side and lifting it out. Several Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillars in garden. Small Tortoiseshell rescued from a spider's web. Large mat of Dodder found in hedge in Marsh Lane among trailing Hops, Traveller's Joy and Dog Rose. Sun Spurge prolific in gardens. Warm spell first week of September.

September/October 1997 — Lois Parker

18th September — first mist of autumn. Spider's webs spangled with dew, pattern plainly visible. Starling flocks larger than ever; Canada Geese skeins. Many small frogs in garden — must have been a recent hatching. Sycamore trees showing black spots on leaves (possibly due to very dry weather). Marsh Lane hedge severely cut — few or no berries on the three Spindle bushes this year; oak, willows, blackthorn and elder all chopped to hedge height.

October/November 1997 — Lois Parker

Mistletoe — time to look for it on trees. Druids associated it with oak (it rarely grows on oaks). Historical associations with protection and Christmas traditions described. Aspen — associated legend and the whispering of its leaves described. Ring-necked Parakeets finding the apple tree a good food source. Many Goldfinches feeding on seeds, especially thistles. A plastic carrier bag in the scullery turned out to contain an unexpected visitor.

1998 | Lois Parker — 12th anniversary tribute

11 articles from 1998_combined.txt (2 false positives removed). Notable: Lois Parker's 12-year anniversary tribute from editor; Orchid leaves seen in March/April; Lesser Bugloss and Viper's Bugloss new to M4 footpath; Pipistrelle bats roosting in Dorney Reach extension; Badger family brought to garden near M4.

Editor's tribute (pub. Feb 1998) — Editor

The editor's note records that for the past twelve years Lois has written her monthly account of the local countryside. Her observations never cease to amaze; without her notes many natural wonders of the parish would go unrecorded. To write these interesting pieces, often sprinkled with historical anecdotes, month in and month out is a major commitment very much appreciated by readers.

December/January 1997/98 — Lois Parker

Wild Violets still blooming. Yarrow and Oxford Ragwort doing well. Redwings and Fieldfares not appeared — too mild for them this winter. Palm showing on Sallow Willows already. Gnats flying in garden in mid-December. Starlings seem to be building nests early (straw falling to ground). Spider made cocoon for its eggs in Viburnum Fragrans bush — pink flowers blooming October

to April; cocoon easy to see without leaves. Wood Blewits. Large numbers of *Russula pellica* (white, funnel-shaped cap).

January/February 1998 — Lois Parker

Small Tortoiseshell or Peacock butterfly hibernating in garden buildings — advised to leave them if found. Water Wagtails in gardens seeking food. 14 nests surviving in M4 rookery. Some Robins choosing a mate before St Valentine's Day. A large frog and ten small ones found overwintering in a plastic sack of logs — left undisturbed. Redwings and Fieldfares had not been seen — corrected the following month: they simply went elsewhere as the winter was too mild, not that they were absent from the country.

February/March 1998 — Lois Parker

Mildest February of the century — butterflies, ladybirds, blackthorns in bloom, hawthorn in leaf. Mallard courtship: head-shaking and wing-flapping. Many Tufted Ducks on river. Tortoiseshell butterfly on bedroom ceiling during cold winds. Greenfinches at last coming into garden. Bullfinch seen by M4 footpath. Badger visited a garden by the M4 and when food was put out brought its whole family — unfortunately dug up the lawn for worms.

March/April 1998 — Lois Parker

Cow Parsley, Pink Dead Nettle, Shepherd's Purse, blue Speedwell and Creeping Speedwell in bloom by mid-March. Purple Ground Ivy and Alkanet abundant. Greenfinches feeding on weeds and nuts. Badger family had visited garden. Both Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker visitors to Harcourt Road gardens. Orchid leaves seen — not yet in bloom. Wood Blewits on the M4 Marsh Lane bridge; *Peziza repanda* by the earth; both fungi noted.

April/May 1998 — Lois Parker

Many hawthorns in bloom by mid-April; Horse Chestnut candles. Jack in the Hedge, Dove's Foot, Black Poplars dropping catkins. Lombardy Poplars with yellowish-green new leaves. Orange-tip and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies. Frogs and toads which had overwintered in a plastic sack have now left for the garden.

May/June 1998 — Lois Parker

Loveliest time of year — meadows and banks covered with Buttercups, Poppies, Marguerites, White Campion and Dog Roses. Canada Geese goslings on river. Young Starlings still demanding food from parents. Holly Blue butterflies. Roundmoor Brook at bottom of Eton Wick gardens: pair of swans with seven cygnets; Canada Geese with goslings. Sparrows mating again — two or three broods per year.

June/July 1998 — Lois Parker

Yellow Meadow Vetchling, Knapweed, Lady's Bedstraw, Lady's Slipper, Scabious, St John's Wort, Agrimony, Rock Rose and Mignonette (mainly by the river) in bloom. Lesser Bugloss and Viper's Bugloss — not seen there before; dormant seeds disturbed when a new fence was erected along the M4. Tadpoles found in water-butt. Juvenile Green Woodpecker calling loudly from fir in next-door garden.

July/August 1998 — Lois Parker

Wet summer causing plants to grow higher than usual. Purple Wall Lettuce doing well. Teasels particularly handsome. Many tiny frogs in garden. Orange Underwing moth in strawberry bed.

Hoverfly caught a Crab Spider on a moon daisy — no escape; Crab Spiders described: change colour like chameleons, usually white or green. Large number of Pipistrelle bats roosting in an extension in Dorney Reach — bats a protected species.

August/September 1998 — Lois Parker

Good broods of Coot, Moorhen and Mallard at Eton Wick despite cats. Pair of swans with seven cygnets — one now missing. Small Blue butterflies in garden. Signs of autumn: Canada Geese flying over; crimson haws, scarlet hips, Purple Nightshade and White Bryony berries; good crop of shiny black elderberries. Hops on hedges; thistle-down and Wall Lettuce seeds dancing in breeze. Heavy rain on 2nd September brought out many snails, especially tiny yellow-shelled ones. Many small frogs in garden.

October/November 1998 — Lois Parker

Large Badger seen in Dorney Reach Road — a Boar because of its size. The local badger setts kept secret for obvious reasons. Comma and Red Admiral butterflies until mid-October. Two Puffballs found under a large bush — too mature to eat. Parasol Mushrooms plentiful; many Common Inkcaps round the apple trees. Robin which deserted in summer has returned. Blue Tits so tame they stay near Bill when he is gardening. Many Goldfinches. Frogs, small and large Toads already hibernating in plastic sacks by the dustbin.

1999 | Lois Parker

8 articles extracted from 1999_combined_2_29MAY26.pdf using pdfplumber. The project file for 1999 was empty; this PDF was uploaded separately. Pages 7, 34, 60, 81, 129, 157, 186, 235 of 252.

November/December 1998 (pub. Feb 1999) — Lois Parker

During a very cold week at the end of November a Dunnock came into the garden to feed on nuts — unusual because Dunnocks (Hedge Sparrows) are ground feeders. Wrens appeared in the garden; less often seen in warmer months when bigger birds menace them. A minute whitish spider hanging from a thread on the hall lampshade — body black, tiny legs almost transparent; unusual and pretty enough to leave in peace. A group of Bramblings. Redwings and Fieldfares seen in Marsh Lane and along the M4 footpath and hedges. Pied Wagtail now visiting the garden — seeds put out attract it as insects are hard to find. White Mellilot found along the M4 footpath — not seen there before; belongs to the clover family, grows to 3 feet, three leaves like clover but narrow and pointed. Some Poppies still blooming. Pink Dove's Foot and Toadflax also producing late blooms. White Dead Nettle doing very well — a hardy plant.

December/January 1998/99 (pub. Feb 1999) — Lois Parker

Mild weather accelerating plant growth. Violets still blooming; Buttercups appeared on the lawn. Rooks seem to be courting — standing in pairs and grooming each other. Blackbirds also very frisky. Jays have come into the garden — never seen there before; their raucous cry and flash of blue feathers make one aware of their presence. Sticky buds on Horse Chestnut trees well advanced; black buds of the Ash. 7th January was the warmest January day since records began in 1841. Hedgehogs came out of hibernation; squirrels very lively. Camomile and Feverfew still blooming. A very large Hogweed still blooming in Marsh Lane — four big flower-heads which were pink instead of the usual white; normally unattractive but the pink colour made it look quite pretty. Cormorants near Boveney Lock have become very tame; probably some near Bray Lock also. A pair of Mallard ducks taking advantage of a quiet place to swim near the brook by the church.

January/February 1999 — Lois Parker

By mid-January a few Celandines in bloom in the front garden and Sallow Willows had produced palm. Some rose bushes along the M4 still had leaves but not many hips, haws or sloe berries remaining. By the first week in February some Cow Parsley and some Blackthorns in bloom. By the second week a cold spell which would doubtless retard growth. Groundsel, Yarrow, Camomile and Oxford Ragwort blooming bravely all winter. Violets doing well. A Thrush seen in a neighbour's garden — becoming rare. Husband found a hedgehog hibernating under garden rubbish — put in a safe place; always warned to take care when dismantling rubbish heaps. Some thistles producing leaves — mainly the Spear Thistle (tall, large purple flower-heads; handsome but unwelcome by gardeners and farmers). The editor reported sighting a female Goldcrest in a yew hedge by the river — the smallest British bird; crest sometimes concealed, pale gold in the female, orange-centred in the male.

February/March 1999 — Lois Parker

Many Coltsfoot plants in bloom on the verge towards the top of Marsh Lane — pleased to see them as they had seemed to be disappearing. Pink Dead Nettle and Cow Parsley in bloom. Alder catkins turned from burgundy to gold. Celandines covering banks and verges; by mid-February the countryside becoming colourful again. An injured mouse came into the greenhouse — made comfortable but it died later. 19 nests in the M4 rookery — not as many as last year; rooks busy repairing and building new nests, some trying to steal a neighbour's mate so occasional fights. March came in like a lion — gale force winds whipped blossom off the Blackthorns. The temporary road near the church claimed its first victim: a large toad. By the first week in March bright blue Speedwells adding colour; some small elms had produced green buds. A very thin spider in the kitchen going up and down on a thread — landed on the toaster then beat a hasty retreat.

March/April 1999 — Lois Parker

By the third week in March Chestnut trees and elder bushes had produced leaves; many Blackthorns had shed their blossom. Blue Alkanet and purple Ground Ivy in bloom. Buttercups had been flowering on the Marsh Lane M4 bridge since February. Mild weather brought out overwintering butterflies — Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells and Yellow Brimstone. Many Ladybirds. Bees busy. A Coal Tit in the garden — usually pushed away by greedy Starlings. March went out like a lamb. Great Crested Grebes now in summer plumage with ruffs and ear tufts around their chestnut cheeks — courtship dance visible on the Thames (resembling a quick dash on the water facing each other). Chicks carried on parents' backs when ready to leave the nest. Many Goldfinches in Trumper's Field. Several plants of Common Storksbill along the M4 footpath — small pink flowers similar to smaller Cranesbills, small fern-like leaves. Some Hawthorns burst into bloom — white blossom to take the place of the withered Blackthorns.

May/June 1999 — Lois Parker

Much rain causing grasses to grow high with early summer flowers in between — Kidney Vetch, Camomile, Hemlock, Mignonette, White Campion and Bladder Campion. Yellow Rocket doing well this year. Elder bushes a mass of white blossom. Dog Rose in bloom by third week in May — delicate pink. Lesser Goat's Beard (Jack Go To Bed At Noon — the flower only opens in the morning). Plenty of Marguerites. Two Jackdaws seen on Dorney Common — unusual; the nearest Lois had seen previously were at the rubbish tip at Bray. Swallows here; many House Martins continually swooping over the garden catching insects. Two Thrushes seen in a garden in Meadow Way — a rare sight. First Red Admiral of the season on 19th May; first Comma on 26th May. Whilst cycling along the Marsh Lane footpath a Weasel ran across straight in front — judging by its size a young one. By mid-June Scabious and Toadflax in bloom; Wild Carrot

plants growing much higher than usual. Son saw a Red Kite in a meadow near the top of Marsh Lane where the farmer was cutting hay — several people were attracted to watch as it swooped and caught prey twice, probably young rabbits. RSPB breeding programme releasing Red Kites at Six (Chilterns).

June/July 1999 — Lois Parker

A Rook found a bag of crisps on the road — realising the middle of the road was not safe, picked up the bag and flew to a neighbour's roof, but the crisps fell out of the torn bag and dropped into the front garden. A Sparrow feeding a youngster on greenfly and whitefly on lupins. Muntjac Deer again seen in the meadow by the M4 Marsh Lane bridge — early morning sightings fairly frequent. A neighbour's pond still full of tadpoles developing legs. A large toad coming into the scullery at night; rustlings in the greenhouse suggest others shelter there. A large group of Long Tailed Tits in the apple trees. A female Stag Beetle found in the garden — becoming rare and being recorded in the area. A Puffball fungus in the garden again — best eaten when half grown; sliced and cooked in butter they are delicious.

July/August 1999 — Lois Parker

Corn Marigolds thriving along the edge of the field by the new bridge over Marsh Lane towards the church. Some plants of Borage along the M4 footpath by the bridge into Bray — bright blue flowers, grow to three feet high, also a herb used for flavouring. Willow Warblers seen; one flew into the window of a shed in Marsh Lane and knocked itself unconscious — rescued and revived. Yellowhammers still in Marsh Lane. Greenfinches coming into the garden again — singing sweetly. Baby Robins (speckled breast affording protection against predators; reddish blush visible by late summer). Cat fascinated by many frogs in the garden; toads also plentiful — slugs fewer this year as a result. Cabbage White butterfly doing well unfortunately — eggs bright yellow, easily seen on underside of cabbage leaves; if eggs can communicate with the butterfly so it moves on to lay elsewhere (Lois describes this remarkable behaviour). Also Gatekeepers, Commas, Red Admirals, Brimstones, Small Whites, Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks. Pedicelled Willowherb everywhere this year.

August/September 1999 — Lois Parker

Bushes loaded with scarlet hips and crimson haws — folklore suggests a hard winter but more likely weather conditions were right when fruit was setting. Another hatching of tadpoles which have now become frogs — everywhere, and the absence of so many slugs shows toads are doing their work well. A pair of Siskins in the garden — stayed some time making their squeaky calls. Slightly smaller than Greenfinches, not so bulky, more yellow feathers; female with strongly streaked underparts. Pond on east side of Dorney Common frequented by Mallard Ducks and Canada Geese — number of Mallards dwindling. Puffball fungi again in garden — two of them, one growing another puffball on top of itself (rather strange). One also in a garden in Harcourt Road. Milkmaid / Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*) appeared in Trumper's Field — rare in the area; site kept secret; once a good number along the M4 footpath. A large blue and green dragonfly in the garden.

October/November 1999 — Lois Parker

Three days and nights of gale force winds tore down the lovely red and gold leaves from trees in mid-October. The following week a very warm sunny period. The mainly mild autumn caused Buttercups and Speedwells to bloom again. During a walk by the Thames and the adjoining field, 37 different flowers were seen in a small area by a neighbour — pleasing to know there are so many wild flowers in the area. A squirrel coming regularly into the garden — not seen one there for years. Large Ranunculus Moth found — attractive beige and brown markings;

feeds on wild and cultivated plants. A Heron perching on a neighbour's roof for some time — doubtless looking for fish ponds. The Spindle Trees in Old Marsh Lane loaded with berries of bright pink containing orange seeds. Some butterflies and dragonflies still to be seen. The large green and blue dragonfly seems to favour the garden as a hunting ground.

2000 | Lois Parker — Final Year

11 articles from 2000_combined.pdf (text-readable despite PDF extension; mild OCR word-splitting). Lois Parker's last full year of columns.

October/November 1999 (pub. early 2000) — Lois Parker

By mid-November many leaves still beautifying the area with scarlet, gold, russet and lemon. Variety of flowers still in bloom: Yarrow (white and pink), White Dead Nettle, Pink Dove's Foot, Wild Carrot, Camomile. A small Whins (Whin/Gorse) bush still bearing yellow blooms found on the Old Marsh Lane side of the M4 footpath — also two Gorse bushes. On the other side: Viper's Bugloss, one Dog Rose bush, several Blackberry bushes still in flower. Ladybirds hiding under leaves in the garden; frogs and toads hibernated in the rubbish dump, moved to safety. Bramblings visited surrounding fields. Thrushes appeared in Harcourt Road. Kestrels — reported to have been driven away by Maidenhead Flood Relief Scheme works — have just moved to another place; seen hovering over M4. 17 nests remain in the M4 rookery but gale force winds will likely reduce this. A Bumble Bee seen in mid-December — most unusual. A few Celandines blooming in the front garden.

December/January 1999/2000 — Lois Parker

15th December, icy north-east wind: 12 Ring-necked Parakeets flew over the garden — the largest number Lois had seen together. Walked along M4 footpath hoping for Fieldfares and Redwings (late arriving — not cold enough in their native land); rewarded by three Fieldfares. Many Long Tailed Tits flitting tree to tree. One Hawthorn bush covered in fresh green leaves unusually late. Violets and many hardy flowers still in bloom. Thrushes now regular visitors to the garden — had not happened for years. Great Spotted Woodpecker visiting Harcourt Road gardens. A squirrel — first in 41 years — seen in a Boveney Road garden. Snow fell 19th December, melted next day; sun through thawing crystals glowed pink. A chrysalis found tucked behind sweeping material on the front doorstep.

January/February 2000 — Lois Parker

Silver Birch trees and wine-red twigs of Lime and Dogwood adding colour. Groups of Long Tailed Tits daily. Starlings robbing each other of bread from the beak. Rooks quarrelling over perches in the fir and sycamore trees. Wild Onion plants shot up on the M4 zigzag. By end of January Celandines and Creeping Buttercup in bloom; Blue Speedwells. Hazel bushes heavy with pale gold catkins. One Blackthorn almost ready to bloom. A mild January. Kestrels flourishing — on telegraph poles and hovering over M4; apparently habituated to noise and activity of Flood Relief Scheme. By mid-February leaves on Elder bushes; a Thrush in Ashford Lane carrying nesting material before St Valentine's Day. A pair of Robins in the garden — hen tolerated by cock as mating time approaches. Large flock of ~50 Fieldfares in the field next to the Eton/Dorney Centre. Editor saw a Sparrowhawk in his garden in Dorney Reach Road — positive ID of a young female. Much Wood Mouse activity in the garden.

February/March 2000 — Lois Parker

Many orange and yellow lichens on roofs and stone fence posts. Hawthorns and Blackthorns starting to bloom by last week in February. A neighbour's pond full of mating frogs — only heads

visible; quickly submerge on hearing footsteps. Frequent Green Woodpecker sightings; Thrushes perching on the fir tree. The crafty Heron around again — frogs part of its diet. By 7th March Blackthorns fully in bloom, beautifying areas around the major works. Yellow Brimstone butterfly first of the year came into the garden. Cup fungi (*Peziza repanda*) found in Trumper's Field — small, fawn, hugging the ground.

April/May 2000 — Lois Parker

By third week in April a profusion of flowers: Jack in the Hedge, Comfrey, Purple Ground Ivy, Buttercups, Vetch, Lords and Ladies, Queen Anne's Lace. Scent of May blossom in the air. Maple bushes along the zigzag attractive with pale gold blossoms. Lime trees with fresh young leaves. Chestnut candles by first week in May. Large patch of White Dead Nettles and Purple Ground Ivy at foot of M4 bridge by Old Marsh Lane. Goldfinches more frequently seen. Roe Deer seen in vicinity of Marsh Lane and adjoining bridlepath where woodland gives cover. Lady's Smock (Milkmaid) growing by a garden pond in Harcourt Road and also at Dorney Court — the large patch at the bend of the M4 footpath on the Bray side had disappeared years ago. Mallard Ducks grazing along verges in Meadow Way and in the meadow near the zigzag. Orange Tip butterflies with some sunshine. A large patch of Violets along the river bank was dug out — Lois deeply disappointed no-one was given the chance to replant them.

May/June 2000 — Lois Parker

Mid-May: Red and White Campion, Bladder Campion, Goat's Beard, Blue Self Heal, Crimson Woundwort, Marguerites, Poppies, Cat's Ear Hawk's Beard, Mallow, Red and White Clover, Lady Slipper all in bloom. By June: pink Dog Roses and creamy Elder blossom. Swifts flying high after insects. A Brimstone Moth in the garden — paler yellow than the male Brimstone butterfly. A Waved Umber Moth — beige and brown with good camouflage and a pretty pattern. Frogs everywhere in the garden — even tucked in trays of bedding plants. Dragonflies and Damselflies in sun; blue and black Banded Demoiselle (*Agria splendens*). Many Crab Spiders in gardens — usually white, hiding amongst plants. A male Stag Beetle found in a flowerpot — healthy specimen; Peter Tyler still wants to be informed of sightings. Mallard Duck with eight ducklings seen at foot of M4 bridge at Old Marsh Lane/Marsh Lane junction — vanished into undergrowth, then crossed to the opposite meadow. First Painted Lady of the year seen nearby.

June/July 2000 — Lois Parker

Young rabbit in Marsh Lane playing 'chicken' — running to the middle of the road and retreating when a car approached, repeatedly. Purple Wall Lettuce in Marsh Lane broken before it could bloom. By July: Blue Chicory and Corn Marigold in bloom. Weather too changeable for usual butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. Gardens pestered with too many snails and slugs — fortunately plenty of frogs and toads to keep numbers down. Greenfinches and a group of Goldfinches visiting garden regularly; perching in the fir tree to sing sweetly. Bullfinches occasional; a Jay visited the bird table for the first time. Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers in other gardens. Broad-leaved Willowherb more plentiful than ever. Sparrowhawk flew down and captured a Sparrow from the mock orange blossom bush, flying off at speed. A female Stag Beetle seen in the garden.

July/August 2000 — Lois Parker

Warm week in mid-July brought out butterflies: Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Skipper, Red Admiral, Peacock, Small White, Large White. Three more Purple Wall Lettuce plants found in Marsh Lane. Traveller's Joy, St John's Wort, Purple Nightshade and Yellow Bedstraw in bloom. Scarlet berries of Lords and Ladies — pyramid-shaped, easily spotted. A young Hare run over in Marsh Lane — hares scarce in the area, good to know still present and breeding. Great

Mullein on the path by the garden wall cut down by maintenance machine before it could seed; two more in back garden. Sunny August days: Comma and Brimstone butterflies, plus a large brown dragonfly. Treecreeper seen in Harcourt Road. Goldcrest in Meadow Way. Fledgling Goldfinch found hiding in the border — put in a safe place.

~August/September 2000 — Lois Parker (Dorney Court)

The large Heron which had frequented Dorney Court for some time landed by the pike pond and was seen to collapse and die. No shortage of herons generally — they are often seen. At Dorney Court: a tiny nest with two eggs found amongst raspberry canes; the delight of watching one egg hatch — probably a Goldcrest (smallest British bird). Attractive blue and green dragonflies in the garden especially around the bullace plums (a bumper crop this year). By September: hedgerows covered with hops; hawthorns heavily laden with crimson haws. Canada Geese flying over to glean in harvested cornfields. Thistledown in a breeze. Several animal casualties in Marsh Lane: shrew, rat, rabbit and magpie. Flowers continue to bloom into winter. Warm sunny days in second week of September brought out butterflies — a Speckled Wood seen in the garden for the first time that year.

September/October 2000 — Lois Parker

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness — warm sunny days in September brought many butterflies. Speckled Woods flying by the river; an unusual number of Red Admirals. Blue and green dragonflies visited the garden again. Hawthorns and elder bushes heavy with berries. Scarlet berries of White Bryony threading through hedges like necklaces, still with flowers on the plant. Purple Nightshade with red berries. Corn Marigold plants found by the river. Blue Alkanet still thriving in Old Marsh Lane. The two Spindle Trees there produced berries, not yet bright pink. Tiny frogs still appearing in the garden (spawn still hatching late in the year). A Hedgehog visiting nightly for left-over cat food — none had visited earlier in summer. Teasels in bloom along M4 footpath; golden Tansies on verges of the road to Amerden Priory. Hummingbird Hawk Moth seen on Busy Lizzies in a Harcourt Road garden in first week of October — long tongue probing flowers. Also in that garden: a Green Woodpecker with a juvenile. Little Owl in Marsh Lane near the bungalows — also seen on telephone wires halfway up Marsh Lane.

October/November 2000 — Lois Parker

October: trees in Harcourt Road turned gold and lemon; later gales and heavy rain stripping them. A few Plume Moths came into the house. Still a few butterflies until end of October. Many small toadstools appeared — only ones identifiable were the pretty mauve *Lactaria amethystina* in the front garden. A Swan landed in a garden in Harcourt Close — stayed a while; swans need a good run to become airborne. Little Owl again seen in the hedge along Marsh Lane near the bungalows — flew to the other side of the meadow on approach. Walnut tree at end of Meadow Way overhangs the path; squirrel seen enjoying the nuts. Four pairs of Greenfinches, numerous tits and Goldfinches now visiting garden. Goldfinches and Long Tailed Tits never staying long. Starlings quarrelling over food so violently they fight in the air — giving smaller birds the chance to feed. Frequent rain keeping flowers going longer than usual.

2001 | Lois Parker died 25 February 2001

No nature column in 2001. The January issue carried an editor's notice that Lois was in hospital; she died 25th February. A full obituary and Peter Tyler's tribute appeared in the April issue.

January 2001 — Editor's notice

'Lois Parker is in hospital and unable to compile the Notes for this month. We send Lois our love and wish her well.' No further Nature Notes appeared in 2001.

April 2001 — Peter Tyler's tribute to Lois Parker

Peter Tyler wrote: 'For all the guides at Dorney Court, Lois' death came as a great sadness. Her knowledge and love of the house and church and their history through the years was outstanding, endorsed by the countless letters of thanks from grateful people whom she had guided with such enthusiasm. Lois was a guide at Dorney Court for over 10 years. Before that she had been a regular guide in the church on open Sundays. At a moment's notice she would mount her bike and appear smiling ready for an afternoon of tours. Not once did she let me down on her regular guiding days. I knew I could rely on her.' The obituary notes that for fifteen years her Nature Notes, written for the magazine, opened eyes to the natural world of the parish — her powers of observation, her knowledge of natural history, and her ability to relate it to Dorney were regularly remarked upon. £80 raised by friends and neighbours was donated in her memory.

2002 | No nature column — incidental record

No dedicated nature columnist. One significant letter references Trumper's Field and Lois Parker's legacy.

2002 — Letter: Trumper's Field wildflowers

A caller telephoned the editor having been utterly captivated by the wonderful display of wild flowers carpeting Trumper's Field, which had reminded her of Lois Parker's appreciation of the natural delights of the local environment and how much her Notes were missed. The editor visited and found, midst the long grasses, a host of coloured blossoms spread throughout this riverside meadow — a beautiful display. The same daily newspaper carried an article headed 'Schemes failing to save wildlife meadows': English Nature had estimated that throughout the country 97 per cent of wildflower meadows had been lost by 1996 and, despite extra government spending, the decline was continuing.

2003 | No nature column — incidental record

No dedicated nature columnist. Tony Dixon-Smith's letters occasionally contain wildlife references.

2003 — Tony Dixon-Smith: butterfly conservation letter

A letter urging Dorney residents to plant for butterflies, noting the decline in numbers due to loss of habitat and changing weather patterns. Recommendations: leave some nettle plants for butterfly larvae; plant buddleia and teasel for adult nectar. The species listed as targets to maintain in Dorney: Large White, Small White, Red Admiral, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Wall Brown and Orange Tip.

2004 | Patricia Powell — 'Lake Lines' wildlife content

No dedicated nature columnist. Patricia Powell's Lake Lines column (Dorney Lake / Jubilee River / Wetlands updates) contains significant wildlife records — notably formal BTO monitoring data, Common Tern nesting and the 100-acre Nature Conservation Area.

2004 — Patricia Powell: White Stork and Dorney Wetlands

A White Stork was seen in Dorney along the Jubilee River — a bird with a six-foot wingspan; no mate was present so it did not share in the nesting attempt by a pair in west Yorkshire (which would have been the first nesting in Britain since St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, in 1416). The stork, and 88 bird species in total (some rare), had been attracted to the man-made Dorney Wetlands. The Wetlands described as a prestigious addition to the landscape providing habitats for an abundance and richness of flora and fauna, and a last haven for many rare and endangered species.

2004 — Patricia Powell: BTO monitoring — 10 years of data

Since 1994, twice-yearly monitoring of breeding birds in conjunction with The British Trust for Ornithology — first in a grid square near Dorney Court, then additionally on the south side of the Lake near the river. Monthly surveys of water and wading birds. Over 10 years: 58 bird species in the selected squares in the breeding season; 35 breed annually. Most prevalent: Lapwing, Wood Pigeon, Skylark, Swallow, Magpie, Starling, Carrion Crow, Linnet (declining locally and nationally). Also recorded: Wheatear, Mistle Thrush, Meadow Pipit. Habitat shift documented: open arable land giving way to Lake, wooded areas with wet meadows, temporary barley sowing and rough construction areas. New colonists: Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Swan, Canada Goose, Tufted Duck (numerous); Skylarks moved into the Return Channel land; Sand Martins colonised banks; Lapwings doing well; Black-headed and Herring Gulls on site early/winters; Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Little Ringed Plover (summer), Whitethroat, Ring-necked Parakeet (nuisance value), Reed Bunting and Sedge Warbler showing encouraging signs of residence. Redshanks hoped for.

2004 (November) — Patricia Powell: Common Terns nesting

Exciting new development in birdlife: Common Terns nesting on the polystyrene 'icebergs' used for rowing-lane marking — the first breeding record for the site. This tern winters in Africa and visits Europe in summer; described as a graceful sea tern that dives for small fish. In addition Redshank sighted on the site.

2004 (December) — Patricia Powell: Nature Conservation Area progress

Pleasing progress on the Nature Conservation Area: 40 hectares (100 acres) on the river side of the Return/Warm-Up Channel. Purpose: to enhance existing habitats and provide new ones for birds, associated insects and other fauna. An open landscape of grassland and pools being created — scale with the Lake and in context as a wetland next to the Thames. Fescue grass laid with inserts of Ox-eye Daisy, Black Knapweed and Wild Carrot. To be grazed by sheep from March 2005 to maintain vegetation at right level for waders and ground-nesting birds. Species already present: Lapwing (year-round), Redshank, Little Ringed Plover. A Manx Shearwater — a sea bird rarely seen so far inland — sighted on the Lake in September. Monitoring ornithologist: Gordon Newport (BBOWT Conservation Manager Paul Allen also involved; London 2012 environmental legacy interest noted).

2005 | Patricia Powell and contributors — wildlife records

No dedicated nature columnist. Patricia Powell's Lake Lines and several letters contain excellent wildlife records.

2005 — Letter: Early birds over Dorney Wetlands

From Wyndham, Village Road, Dorney: Swallows seen over Dorney Wetlands on 30th April. Skylarks seen in February in the same area. Birds seem to be responding to an earlier shift in the seasons — bumble bees, butterflies and ladybirds also all appearing earlier. Hopes for a long warm spring and summer.

2005 — Patricia Powell: Jubilee River / 73 bird species (winter)

The amenity value of the Jubilee River becoming more apparent as the seasons pass — shrub and tree plantations well established, bare gravel areas with good cover of grasses and plants, network of footpaths established. Environment Agency report: over the winter period, some 73 species of birds were visitors. Included a flock of 2,000 Golden Plovers, Lapwings and Sandpipers. Many species taking up permanent residence: as intended, the small islands in the Dorney Wetlands providing nesting sites for Swans, Coots, Mallard, Tufted Duck and Geese — young to be seen very easily. Herons and Cormorants also quite striking residents. Mammals: Muntjac Deer, Fox and Badger using bridges to cross the river in broad daylight. Environment Agency plans for the north side of the wetlands: special breed cattle to graze grassy mounds and islands, to create a nutrient-rich habitat favoured by Skylarks. Agency regularly monitoring bird populations, plants, animals (especially bats), aquatic life and fish populations.

2005 — Patricia Powell: Dorney Lake NCA birds / new species

Non-rowing avian residents and visitors to the Dorney Lake grounds: up to 14 water bird species; flocks of Wood Pigeons feasting on wild flower area seeds. Stock Dove and Feral Pigeon sighted; Jackdaw numbers increased. Over the year: Stonechat, male Corn Bunting, Linnet, Reed Bunting, Lapwing, Little Ringed Plover (breeding season), Sand Martin (nested in a sand stockpile). Nature Conservation Area coming into its own with arrival of 150 Suffolk sheep to graze the open part. Monitoring ornithologist Gordon Newport positive about prospects for the NCA as a wildlife habitat.

2005 — Jill Palmer (Dorney Court): butterfly count, 2 August 2005

Letter from Jill Palmer, Dorney Court: 'I was delighted when one of our visitors to Dorney Court handed me a scrappy bit of blue paper with the following — Butterflies in Dorney Court garden on 2nd August 2005.' Count: Small White x3, Green Veined White x2, Large White x2, Brimstone x3, Peacock x10, Comma x2, Red Admiral x1, Painted Lady x1, Holly Blue x1, Meadow Brown x1. Total: 26 butterflies of 10 species in one hour. The visitor noted that it would take him a whole year to spot these in his own garden and only an hour at Dorney Court — indicating the garden was environmentally friendly.

2006 | No nature column — no significant wildlife content

Patricia Powell and Tony Dixon-Smith continue. The 2006 file is notably smaller (152KB versus the typical 350KB), suggesting some issues may be missing from the archive. No significant wildlife records found.

2007 | Tony Dixon-Smith — regular wildlife letters

No dedicated nature columnist. A correspondent writing as 'Wyndham, Village Road, Dorney' (Tony Dixon-Smith / D.D.) sends a remarkable series of seasonal wildlife letters throughout 2007 — effectively a nature column under a different guise.

Feb/March 2007 — Tony Dixon-Smith: Jubilee River birds

Good news: Moorhens back in strength at Dorney Wetlands, Jubilee River — distinctive red beaks with yellow tip and white flash on undertail; over a dozen seen at end of February. Hundreds of Golden Plover and Lapwings still swooping over Jubilee River and surrounding areas. Dorney Memorial Garden resident Crows have set up their 'Dorney Triangle' — nest in Memorial Garden, watchtower on a neighbour's roof 100 yards south and another neighbour's tallest tree 100 yards north; any undesirables (particularly Sparrowhawks) are quickly seen off. Snowdrops lasting well — over two months. Blue iris, blue Canterbury bell, Soldiers and Sailors (Pulmonaria) all noted.

April 2007 — Tony Dixon-Smith: spring plants and birds

More settled weather encouraging many plants: Wood Spurge, Red Dead Nettle, blue Forget-me-not, bright blue Geneva Bugle, tall green Horsetail, clumps of yellow Coltsfoot, low-lying large-headed Dandelions, tall Buttercups, Daisies, light blue Periwinkle, Bluebells, Soldiers and Sailors, Lords and Ladies (King of the Forest), yellow Primroses, various Primulas and Tulips. A Reed Bunting visiting the garden — distinctive black head, white moustache and white collar; also seen on the reeds at Jubilee River. One grey morning in late March: several hundred Starlings swooped from the sky landing on the Dorney Memorial Garden oak trees — wheeling and turning in perfect formation before disappearing as suddenly as they arrived.

May 2007 — Tony Dixon-Smith: spring flowers and birds

The generally dry, warm weather in April brought early: blue and lilac Wisteria, Greater Celandine, white Cow Parsley, Periwinkle, Pansies, wild yellow Camomile, Ox-eye Daisies, Dandelions, Buttercups, Daisies, Honeysuckle, white and deep purple Lilac, Vetch, and blossom galore including May, Apple, Pear, white and red Horse Chestnut. Plenty of bird chicks judging by extra-long parental feeding hours — Blackbirds and Robins up from 5am to 8pm. Resident Memorial Garden Crows very busy.

June 2007 — Tony Dixon-Smith: chick season and Cuckoo first in five years

May a busy month for birds feeding their young: first chicks from Sparrows, Starlings, Robins, Wrens, Blackbirds, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Jays and Woodpeckers. Chaffinch, Thrush, Mistle Thrush and Ringdoves also busy. Thanks to Reed Buntings visiting the garden in March and April, and much in evidence in the reeds along Jubilee River, a Cuckoo was heard on 11th and 12th May — the first heard in Dorney for five years or so. The Cuckoo lays her eggs in the nest of the Reed Bunting, so the presence of Reed Buntings suggested a good chance of hearing it.

July/August 2007 — Tony Dixon-Smith: summer birds and flowers

Good breeding season for Chaffinches, Robins, Wrens, Blackbirds, Blue and Great Tits, Woodpeckers, Jays, Sparrows, Starlings and Magpies. Unpredictable weather from mid-June through July with heavy storm winds and rain damaged some plants while others thrived. Roses, Soldiers and Sailors and Geraniums badly affected during poor spell.

Autumn 2007 — Tony Dixon-Smith: avian disease alert

Red Alert: wild garden birds suffering badly from avian trichomoniosis — a virus passed on by saliva causing throats to swell so birds can neither eat nor drink. Important to clean out birdbaths and bird tables regularly. Species affected: Sparrow, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Blackbird, Yellowhammer, Siskin. Scientists from the Zoological Society of London working on tests. The virus is a further blow to wild birds — numbers down 50% in 10 years.

November/December 2007 — Tony Dixon-Smith: Jubilee River winter birds

On the Dorney Wetland islets, Jubilee River: a dozen beautiful Cormorants seen — several young birds in their first winter coat (white chest and belly); hundreds of Lapwings and Golden Plovers giving aerial displays before landing on an islet; dozens of Coots; varieties of ducks. In the garden: Robins dominant, Blue and Great Tits, Ringdoves, Chaffinches, Blackbirds, Sparrows, Jays, Green and Spotted Woodpeckers, Hedge Accentors. Also: Spindle berries with red and orange berries; tall elegant yellow Evening Primrose; orange Chinese Lanterns; Roses making a last stand; Dandelions, Buttercups, Daisies and winter yellow Jasmine. Snowdrop shoots already appearing.

2008 | No nature column — no significant wildlife content

Patricia Powell and Tony Dixon-Smith continue. No significant wildlife records found in the 2008 file.

2009 | Tony Dixon-Smith — ‘NATURE NOTES +’ columns begin

4 articles from 2009_combined_-_converted.txt. Tony Dixon-Smith begins embedding nature observations under a ‘NATURE NOTES +’ heading alongside his characteristic humorous commentary. This appears to be his trial format before the regular column confirmed from September 2011.

~August 2009 — Tony Dixon-Smith

Plants in late summer: much rain and overcast skies have given many plants a new lease of life. Buddleia, roses and geraniums enjoying an extension of their season. Reference to the Met Office’s failed ‘barbecue summer’ prediction. General note on late-summer plant endurance.

~October/November 2009 — Tony Dixon-Smith

November’s mixture of weather testing plants’ endurance: Roses, Japanese pink Anemone, Lavatera, yellow Evening Primrose, orange Chinese Lanterns, red and orange Spindle berries, white Alyssum; new growth from yellow Mahonia and yellow Winter Jasmine. Reference to the field between Dorney Village Road and the Jubilee River — last month Lois Parker’s old observation territory noted.

~September/October 2009 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Jubilee River)

Thanks to a beautiful September, plants still flowering well: pink Japanese Anemones, white Alyssum, red and orange Spindle berries, mauve Lavatera, blue Canterbury Bells, white Russian Vine, blue and pink Geraniums, several Roses. By the Jubilee River: lots of Rose Hips, some Spindle berries, Forget-me-not, blue Succory (Chicory), white Campion, Corn Chamomile and Scentless Mayweed. To Tony’s great surprise: between the Village Road and the Jubilee River he found a [remarkable plant, detail unclear due to OCR].

~March/April 2009 — Tony Dixon-Smith

Despite cool winds, sun encouraging: yellow Kerria bushes, Cherry trees and Mirabelle bushes in flower; lots of Crocus, Primulas, Daffodils; white, mauve and purple Violets; blue and mauve Periwinkle; blue and mauve Pulmonaria (Soldiers and Sailors); yellow Celandine. The Red Kite spotted again around West Town Farm and Burnham Abbey. Lots of courtship and singing amongst Robins, Blackbirds, Wrens, Blue Tits, Great Tits and Long Tailed Tits, Chaffinches and Starlings.

2010 | Tony Dixon-Smith — 'NATURE +' columns

9 articles from 2010_combined_-_converted.txt. All by Tony Dixon-Smith from Wyndham, Village Road, Dorney — his regular 'NATURE +' format at its richest. The Olympic Rowing course is under construction at Dorney Lake throughout this year. Red Kites now a regular sight over the Parish.

Jan/Feb 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith

Despite the coldest winter for over 30 years and ongoing 'climate warming' cold spell, low-lying yellow Aconites, Snowdrops, Crocus, Primroses, spring Mahonia and Witch-hazel all doing well, as are the catkins of Hazelnut, Silver Birch and Alder. Dogwood bushes at the Rowing Trench are multicoloured — red, pink, yellow, mauve, purple and orange — a wonderful show through late autumn, winter and early spring. Red Kites now frequently seen flying lower over Dorney Parish in search of food during the cold spell. Adult Foxes seen during the day. Wild birds scrambling for food and fresh water: Thrushes, Blackbirds, Robins, Chaffinches, Pied Wagtails, Hedge Accentors, all visiting feeders.

~March/April 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith

A few days of sunshine in early April brought forth a host of golden Daffodils, Tulips, Cowslips, Hyacinths, Celandine, Violets, Wallflowers, Pulmonaria, Primroses, Crocus, Camellias, plus blossoms of Pussy Willow, white Mirabelle and pink Cherry. On a mild, dry, sunny March 24th a Swallow landed on the telephone line — probably blown in by southerly winds; not recalled seeing a Swallow so early in the year.

~April/May 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith

Good April and mixed cool May. Flowers and blossoms abounding — wild Primrose, Pansies, Bluebells, blue and mauve Periwinkle, purple and mauve Soldiers and Sailors, deep blue Hyacinths, white and red Camellias, blue and mauve Wisteria, Tulips, Wallflowers, green-leaved Alkanet with dainty blue and white flowers, deep blue Iris, plus May, Lilac, Apple, Pear, Cherry and Horse Chestnut blossom.

~May/June 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith

Warm, dry June and July with mild-mix August. Plants doing well: blue Succory, pink/blue Scabious, orange Chinese Lanterns, King of the Forest orange/green berries, pink and white Convolvulus, Hedge Bindweed with large white trumpet flowers, white sweet-scented Meadowsweet, lots of Poppies, reddish-purple Greater Knapweed. More Sparrows this year than usual — a good sign.

~June/July 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith (well-flagged)

From 4.30am until 9.30pm Blackbirds the dominant songsters. Weather generally suited birth and survival of bird chicks — lots of Blackbirds and Blue Tits along with Robins, Starlings, Hedge Accentors, Chaffinches, Wrens, Woodpeckers, Jays, Ring Doves, Wood Pigeons and Magpies. Two resident crows nesting in Dorney Memorial Garden busy seeing off intruders — Rooks, Buzzards and Red Kites — flying too close to their nesting chicks.

~July/Aug 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith

End of August and beginning of September beautiful weather. Bull rushes and tall sedge grass enhanced by the Rowing Trench's two small ponds, with lots of dragonflies. Elsewhere: Russian Vine, Violets, Scyllas, Autumn Crocus, orange Chinese Lanterns, yellow daisy-like Fleabane,

Roses and Canterbury Bells doing well. Red alert for Greenfinches — suffering some devastating throat disease (avian trichomoniosis). Change bird water frequently.

~Sept/Oct 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith

October blown in with bluster then warmed into sunshine. Resurging Canterbury Bells, Dahlias, Gladioli, Roses, pink Japanese Anemones, Chinese Lanterns, Russian Vine, Michaelmas Daisies, pink Spindle berries, Rose hips, Mountain Ash berries and Conkers. All garden birds busy — family of Crows, Rooks, Magpies and Jackdaws in evidence. Some smaller garden birds temporarily disappeared — plenty of fruit and berries available. Reminder to clean out bird boxes.

~Oct/Nov 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Heaven)

October with bluster; first half of November dull and sunny with mild days. Roses, Japanese Anemones, Geraniums, pink Scillas, yellow Primroses, white Alyssum, red Quince flowers, Michaelmas Daisies, yellow winter Jasmine, Chrysanthemums and lots of red and orange Spindle berries flourishing. All garden birds doing well — more Sparrows than ever — a good sign. Two beautiful Jays visited the garden together — one distinctly young (perhaps being shown where to find food by a parent). More Red Kites and Buzzards to be seen in the Parish area. A beautiful young Thrush visiting the bird stand — another welcome visitor.

~Nov/Dec 2010 — Tony Dixon-Smith

End of August through mid-September: excellent weather. All wild garden birds doing well — and good news: a young Greenfinch appeared — first one in over a year, parents hopefully having survived/overcome the deadly trichomoniosis virus which had decimated the species. All other birds also doing well. Red Kites and Buzzards seen enjoying easterly and southerly breezes.

2011 | Tony Dixon-Smith — ‘NATURE +’ columns (early)

3 articles from 2011_combined_-_converted.txt. The contributor list confirms Tony Dixon-Smith's formal column ran from September 2011 — these are his first formal column entries. Good bird chick season and notable first-year records.

Jan/Feb 2011 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Training + Romance)

White Christmas 2010 — coldest December for 120 years. Wild garden birds went through a tough period. Snow not too difficult at first; gradually more severe. Birds found fresh water a challenge. Reminder to clean bird boxes by end of February. The Rowing Trench dogwood bushes giving a spectacular winter colour show.

~Apr/May 2011 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Safety First + Peace)

Generally mild and dry weather encouraging Tulips, Wallflowers, Soldiers and Sailors, woodland Bluebells, yellow reflex Stonecrop, mauve Chive flowers, Columbines, Dog Roses, Ox-eye Daisies, Periwinkle, green-leaved Alkanet, pink Honesty, deep blue Iris, Lupins and Foxgloves to flourish. Weather helped bird chicks to thrive. Several bird incidents: a Ring Dove chased off a Magpie from its feeding patch. Another Magpie created a food larder — taking bread from the bird stand and burying it in soft soil. First Bearded Tit pair noted visiting the garden — quite spectacular (first-time record). Pair of beautifully coloured Bearded Tits visited the garden for the first time.

~May/Jun 2011 — Tony Dixon-Smith (High Noon Village Road)

Generally warm and dry May to mid-June. Beautiful deep blue Canterbury Bells, Iris, Foxgloves, Columbine, white-flowered Wild Garlic, Lords and Ladies, Dog Roses, Violets, pink Lavatera, yellow Fleabane, yellow Stonecrop, yellow-centred Chinese Lanterns, bluish-purple Periwinkle, Daisies and yellow Pimpernel. Good weather helping many bird chicks to survive: Sparrows, Robins, Starlings, Blue and Great Tits, Pied Wagtail, Hedge Accentors.

2012 | Tony Dixon-Smith — 'NATURE +' columns (OCR'd from scanned PDF)

10 articles recovered from 2012_combined_c.pdf by OCR (292-page scanned image PDF, no text layer). Tony Dixon-Smith's richest year of nature observation. Notable: first Greenfinch return after trichomoniosis; Bearded Tits visiting for the first time; wettest April since 1910. 2012 is also the year of the London Olympics rowing events at Dorney Lake.

Jan/Feb 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Be Prepared)

Mild December and January — plants bursting forth: Pansies, Primulas, Periwinkle, Soldiers and Sailors, Celandine, winter Jasmine, Snowdrops, Heather, Alyssum, Crocus, Cherry blossom and Daisies. Dogwood bushes at the Rowing Trench giving spectacular colour since November 2011: yellow, mauve, purple, orange and flame red against pine trees and Silver Birch. Beautiful sunrises over Windsor, sunsets over Maidenhead — possibly enhanced by Icelandic volcanic cloud. Bird life doing well in the mild winter: Robins, Blackbirds, Sparrows, Starlings, Blue/Great/Long-tailed Tits, Wrens, Hedge Accentors, Ring Doves, Pigeons, Magpies and three resident Crows. Plenty of Red Kite and Buzzard sightings. Still no Greenfinches — worrying.

Feb/Mar 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Sing Up)

February cold snap catching out Daffodils. As month progressed and warmed, Daffodils, Snowdrops, Aconites, Crocuses, Soldiers and Sailors, Periwinkles, Kerria, Forget-me-nots, Hyacinths, Primulas, Camellias and tulips all emerged. Trimmed dogwood at Rowing Trench still beautiful in mid-March. Increasing warmth stirred birds to a crescendo of song — love in the air, males singing for new amours. Tit boxes now occupied. Resident Crows building new nest in the Village Road Memorial Garden — snapping off fresh pliable oak twigs, clever Crows! Early March: Blackbird singing at 5am in early mist, joined by Robins, Thrushes, Sparrows, Starlings, Wrens, Ring Doves and Pigeons. A pair of Bearded Tits visited the garden for the first time — quite spectacular.

Mar/Apr 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith

After relatively warm, dry, sunny March: Violets, Kerria, Magnolia, Camellia, Primrose, Pansies, Daffodils, Tulips, Soldiers and Sailors, Hyacinths, Wallflowers, Mahonia, Periwinkle, Snake-head Fritillary, Pheasant-eye, green Alkanet, Quince and the blossoms of Cherry, Pear, Apple and Mirabelle burst forth. Cold Siberian blast then made birds active feeders. Mid-April already: Robin chicks in the back garden — Sir Bobby Jnr., robin extraordinaire, has done a good job. Basil the Blackbird — head cantor of the dawn chorus. Wild life and plants give much joy — Dorney described as a beautiful oasis surrounded by three major towns.

Apr/May 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (and WA+HPB=RD+PTS)

Disturbed April and May — contrary winds, rain, sudden drops in temperature. Camellias and Magnolias suffered, while Forget-me-nots, Wisteria, Montana, Wallflowers, Tulips, Primulas, Pansies, Cowslips, Soldiers and Sailors, Rhododendrons, green Alkanet, Columbines, Horse

Chestnut, Apple, Pear, Lilac and Laburnum thrived. Birds showing sturdy resistance after mild March: Robin and Blue Tit chicks flourishing; good signs of Goldfinches, Hedge Accentors, Wrens, Blackbirds, Sparrows, Starlings, Ring Doves, Wood Pigeons, Magpies and resident nesting Crows. One Greenfinch seen — hopes for more.

May/Jun 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (The Choir + The RSM)

Wettest April since 1910, then hot dry weather from mid-May. Plants resurgent: Soldiers and Sailors, Periwinkle, green Alkanet, Forget-me-nots, Roses, Ox-eye Daisies, red Poppies, mauve Chive flowers, 6ft Foxgloves, Stonecrop, Columbines and Cat's Ear. All birds with chicks found stormy gusty June winds tough going. Larger birds — Kites, Buzzards, Crows, Rooks, Magpies, Jays, Ring Doves and Pigeons — had to lie low. Smaller garden birds doing well, still hoping for more Greenfinches. Good to see Swallows back. The Rowing Trench acting as a wind tunnel on some days.

Jul/Aug 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Digital Calm / Olympics)

Wettest April, May, June and early July on record, then settled summer from third week July through mid-August. Roses, Californian Poppies, Geraniums, tall yellow daisy-like Fleabane, King of the Forest berries, Buddleia, beautifully scented Phlox, Forget-me-not, deep violet Bugle plant, white and crimson Clover, Canterbury Bells, rose-purple Teasels. 5ft+ wild Rosebay Willowherb outside the kitchen door — wonderful pink flowers. Young Blue and Great Tits, Robins, Chaffinches, Wrens, Hedge Accentors, Blackbirds, Sparrows, male and female Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatch, Ring Doves, Wood Pigeons, Magpies and at least three newly-hatched young Crows. Red Kites and Buzzards enjoying easterly and southerly breezes. This year the London Olympics rowing took place at Dorney.

Aug/Sept 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (That Apostrophe)

Mid-September excellent weather. Roses, Californian Poppies, Sweet Peas, Geraniums, pink Willowherb, purple and yellow Toadflax, Snapdragon, tall yellow Snow Thistle (almond-scented flowers), reddish-purple Greater Knapweed, deep blue Chicory and yellow Groundsel. All wild garden birds doing well. A young Greenfinch appeared — first in over a year — parents must have survived/overcome the deadly trichomonosis virus that decimated the species. A major milestone in the recovery of Greenfinches noted.

Sept/Oct 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Dictionary or Diamonds)

September warm and pleasant, first half of October more unsettled. Roses, Japanese Anemones, Geraniums, pink Scillas, Evening Primroses, white Alyssum, orange Chinese Lanterns, red/orange Spindle berries, Michaelmas Daisies, blue Autumn Crocus, orange Mountain Ash berries and Conkers. All garden birds thriving in mild weather — more Robins than usual; one particularly curious, inspecting gardening boots and the mower. Evidence of Green Woodpecker activity on the front lawn — aerated appearance as it searches for ants. Spotted Woodpeckers preferring peanuts on the bird stand. Two beautiful Jays visited together — one distinctly young, apparently being shown by a parent where to find food.

Oct/Nov 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (Forward England)

October coolest since 2003. First half of November a mixture of dull and sunny, fairly mild. Roses, Japanese Anemones, Geraniums, pink Scillas, yellow Primroses, white Alyssum, red Quince flowers, Michaelmas Daisies, yellow winter Jasmine, Chrysanthemums and lots of red and orange Spindle berries. All garden birds doing well — more Sparrows than ever (a good

sign). Two Jays visited together — one apparently a young bird being taught. More Red Kites and Buzzards in the Parish area.

Nov/Dec 2012 — Tony Dixon-Smith (True Grit)

Siberian freezing weather in February had slowed plants — yet Aconites, Snowdrops, wild Primroses, Heather and Dogwood bushes braved it out. Several Pied Wagtails appeared (usually insect-eaters) joining increasing numbers of Robins, Blackbirds, Sparrows, Hedge Accentors, Wrens, Starlings, Ring Doves, Wood Pigeons, nesting Tits, Magpies and three Crows looking for food and fresh water. On the Rowing Trench: Swans, Mallard Ducks, black and white Tufted Ducks, Coots, Grebes, Canada Geese and Cormorants all present. In Dorney village, a Robin of particular virtuosity noted — knighted 'Sir Bobby Jnr., Robin Extraordinaire' in the D.D. column.

2013 | Tony Dixon-Smith — column continues (hospitalised one month)

From 2013_combined_-_converted__1_.txt. No standalone NATURE+ headings found. Tony Dixon-Smith was hospitalised for 8 days with a severe knee injury — one issue confirmed as missing his article. His letters in this year are predominantly musical/community commentary, with incidental wildlife observations.

2013 — Incidental wildlife records (Tony Dixon-Smith)

Red Kites recorded chased off by the resident Memorial Garden crow pair. In autumn, a reminder to leave leaf piles for hibernating hedgehogs and to keep old wood and logs for overwintering insects.

2014 | Tony Dixon-Smith — column continues

From 2014_combined_-_converted.txt. No NATURE+ headings. Predominantly musical/community letters. Incidental wildlife records only.

2014 — Incidental wildlife records (Tony Dixon-Smith)

Hedgehog 'calling cards' found on front and back lawns (droppings — evidence of hedgehog presence). Buzzards and Red Kites enjoying the warm uplift of air in summer. Mr and Mrs Duck back again on rooftops. Thrush, Blackbirds and Ring Doves in garden.

2015 | FILE MISSING

2015 is not present in the Project Files archive. Tony Dixon-Smith's column was running throughout this year. Content unknown.

2016 | Tony Dixon-Smith — column continues

From 2016_combined_-_converted.txt. No NATURE+ headings. Letters are almost entirely humorous musical/political commentary. Brief nature observations embedded.

2016 — Incidental wildlife records (Tony Dixon-Smith)

Resident crow pair chasing off marauding Rooks and Red Kites noted across multiple letters. Reminder to clean out bird boxes. Buddleia and Scabious noted for attracting butterflies. Yellow Fleabane (butterflies' favourite) seen along Lake End Road.

2017 | Tony Dixon-Smith + Kristina Perkins

From 2017_combined_-_converted.txt. No NATURE+ headings from TDS. Kristina Perkins (Dells Cottage, Dorney Common) begins writing seasonal lifestyle columns that include nature observations.

2017 — Incidental wildlife records (Tony Dixon-Smith)

Resident crow pair chasing off Rooks, Jackdaws and Red Kites. Tony Dixon-Smith offering advice on garden fencing: Muntjac deer and a pair of either Fallow or Roe Deer (unable to tell them apart) visiting the garden, along with Rabbits. Deer find Yew trees irresistible.

2017 — Kristina Perkins (Dells Cottage, Dorney Common)

Kristina Perkins begins contributing seasonal lifestyle columns from Dells Cottage, Dorney Common. Nature observations include: fox broke into the chicken run on two successive occasions (digging under mesh, then finding a crack in the wood). Muntjac deer and a pair of possible Fallow or Roe Deer visiting the garden — Yew trees particularly attractive to the deer.

2018 | ‘Something New’ group — wild flower initiative

From 2018_combined_-_converted.txt. No dedicated nature column. The ‘Something New’ community group launches a Dorney Wild Flower Initiative, with Peter Tyler and John Barker giving a major talk on parish wild flowers.

Feb 2018 — Peter Tyler and John Barker: parish wild flowers talk

At the ‘Something New’ coffee morning, Peter Tyler and John Barker gave a talk on the wild flowers in the Parish and surrounds and the consequent butterflies, moths and insects. Key data: approximately 300 species of wild flowers within the Parish (numbers change as soil and climate conditions change). Wild flowers attract insects, birds, mice and small mammals; honey bees and bumble bees rely on them. Advice: avoid chemicals; don’t cut lawns like bowling greens; keep a small wild area in the garden; keep nettles for butterfly larvae; pile of logs for beetle banks so Stag Beetles will appear again.

2018 — Dorney Wild Flower Initiative

‘Something New’ group discussion on making the Parish more wildlife-friendly. Practical guidance issued on establishing wild flower areas: select suitable ground patches, cut grass in late summer rather than spring, rake off clippings, sow wild flower seed mix. First project: wild flowers at the War Memorial Garden. John Barker had a stock of seed varieties for free distribution.

2018 — Badger Colony letter (via Peter Tyler)

A message from the Marsh Lane Badger Colony (written via Peter Tyler, with characteristic humour): badger families have dug holes into the M4 motorway embankment and occupied setts there for many years. Complaints about Highways England cutting down trees and placing sticks down sett entrances, then covering holes with green wire mesh. The letter protests on behalf of the badger families about disturbance to their long-established setts — a serious underlying conservation concern documented with characteristic light touch.

2019 | 'Wayfarer' — new Nature Notes column; bird records

From 2019_combined.txt. Three Nature Notes articles signed 'WAYFARER' — the pen-name used by Peter Tyler for his 1962–1968 column; a deliberate echo. A major /Peter Tyler article records 43 new bird species 2000–2018. Virginia Silvester's name appears immediately before the global warming Nature Notes — she may be its author, or co-contributor.

2019 — Nature Notes: Nettles and Small Tortoiseshell (Wayfarer)

When wandering along less regularly used paths in the Parish, nettles abound especially in damp, sunny locations. Three varieties of true nettle: *Urtica* (most common), Roman Nettle (most violent sting), and Annual Nettle (seeds rapidly). Dead Nettle belongs to a different family — bears mauve-pink flowers and lacks the sting. Nettles provide food plant for two broods of Small Tortoiseshell per year — one in June, one in August/September. Some of the autumn brood hibernate through winter, re-appearing in early spring. Historical uses of nettle: nettle tea and beer; young tops boiled as a vegetable; leaves as a source of chlorophyll; stems yield tough fibre used for household linen. Photograph in the article: two Small Tortoiseshell butterflies against nettle leaves, one specimen labelled Perthshire 1898 — from what appears to be an ageing collection.

2019 — Nature Notes: Fungi (Wayfarer)

A seasonal essay on fungi diversity: Mushrooms, Toadstools, Moulds, Mildews, Yeasts and Rusts all covered. Unlike green plants, fungi obtain food from living or dead organic material. The familiar toadstool is the fruiting body; the rest lies beneath as a mass of thin strands absorbing and storing nutrients through summer for the autumn fruiting. Field Mushroom can be found on rich pasture and grassland; its growth often produces Fairy Rings — some known to be over four centuries old. Named poisonous species: Devil's Boletus, Destroying Angel, Fool's Mushroom and Death Cap. Giant Puffball — our largest fungus — said to be safe and best to eat. The writer records having seen examples growing in the Parish.

2019 — Nature Notes: Global Warming/Global Warning (Wayfarer/Virginia Silvester)

The government Committee for Climate Change has stated that almost a billion trees must be planted by 2050 as Britain's contribution to offsetting global warming. One fifth of farmland to be turned into forest, peatland or biomass crops. 30,000 hectares of trees to be planted each year — treble current rates. The Parish scores well if account is taken of plantings made over the last twenty years associated with Dorney Lake and the Jubilee River. Plantlife charity advocating halving the frequency of road verge cutting (from four times to twice a year) to allow wildflowers to set seed. 30,000 miles of grass verges to be left to grow longer under the plan. The Woodland Trust aiming to plant 64 million new trees over 10 years. Dutch Elm disease has taken 60 million trees in Britain since 1987; estimated 80% of all Ash trees will be affected by Ash Dieback disease within a few decades.

2019 — Peter Tyler: 43 new bird species 2000–2018

In 2000, an effort was made to bring together Dorney observations and records of natural history: birds, plants, animals, insects. Results summarised in 'Natural History of Dorney Parish by Peter Tyler'. Total count at the Millennium: 129 bird species. Over the succeeding 18 years, recognition and data recording continued to add records. Sources used: Bucks Bird Club database, Berkshire Bird Atlas, Bucks Bird Atlas, personal records of local amateur ornithologists (especially Brian Clews of Cookham). Three locations: Dorney Common, Jubilee River, and Dorney Lake have been highly attractive to migratory and colonising birds. Dorney's strategic importance: it provides a wildlife corridor between Burnham Beeches and the Chilterns

to the north and Windsor parkland to the south. New verifiable records (2000–2018) total 43 additional species. Total bird species recorded in the Parish by 2018: 172. Dorney Lake: up to 140 bird species recorded by birdwatchers. Editor's note: the 2000 report by Peter Tyler and its 2018 update can be read on the Dorney History Group website.

2020 | 'Wayfarer' — Nature Notes column (7 articles)

7 articles from 2020_combined-c.pdf (text file with PDF extension). All signed 'Wayfarer' — Peter Tyler's pen-name from his 1962–68 column, revived for his return. Additional contributions: Brian Clews (invited by Wayfarer) on Dorney Common autumn birds; a Wildflowers on Dorney Common article; an environmental issues article with Red Kite observations. COVID year — most DPN activity suppressed.

Dec 2019/Jan 2020 — Wayfarer: Mistletoe

Mistletoe: one of our strangest plants, shrouded in mystery because of its peculiar life history and pagan origins. Reputed to reveal hidden treasure, open locked doors and drive away witches and evil spirits — yet firmly established in Christmas celebrations. Tradition of hanging mistletoe goes back to ancient Druids; in Norse mythology, the God of Peace Balder inspired it to be named the Kissing Plant. In the wild it may grow randomly on a range of trees including Lime, Poplar, Apple and occasionally Oak. It is parasitic, drawing water and nutrients from the host tree, though not killing it. Male and female plants are separate — only female plants bear the white berries. Birds (particularly Mistle Thrushes, hence the name) eat the berries and transfer the sticky seeds to other trees, where they germinate under the bark. Mistletoe auctions at Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire have become a national institution. Dorney's connection with Bees noted — the Old English 'Dorney' meant Island of Bees.

Spring 2020 — Wayfarer: Spring arrival signs

Familiar signs that Spring has arrived as Winter releases its grip: birds proclaim return from migration by singing noisily from the crack of dawn. Trees and shrubs burst into white and pink blossom; small twigs sprout catkins; larger trees unfurl sticky buds; the whole hedgerow is transformed. Insects emerge with the rising temperature. The closer we look at the challenges facing nature, the more remarkable are the patterns of survival. Observations of Spring grown in large polytunnels under controlled conditions as a commercial crop — an unusual practice. A reminder that the word 'Dorney' meant Island of Bees in Old English.

Summer 2020 — Wayfarer: Dutch Elm Disease

Dutch Elm Disease (DED): a lethal fungal disease spread by the Elm Bark Beetle (*Scolytus*), known for over 100 years. Introduced into Britain in beetle-infested timber imported from America. Wiped out almost the entire population of Elm trees in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. At low infestation levels a sturdy Elm has some chance of survival — fungal spores block the tree's cellular structure, starving and wilting it. The infected tree remains attractive to bark beetles and so spreads the disease further. The British Elm is just surviving with fewer than before but a hybrid variety (*Ulmus Lobel*) has shown resistance and was offered commercially for the first time at the Chelsea Flower Show in the previous year.

~Summer 2020 — Wayfarer: Environmental issues and Red Kite

A declaration of the writer's interest in nature: as a small boy fascinated by ants nesting under concrete paving slabs in his parents' Slough garden; then caterpillars on cabbages; then a bicycle gave freedom to explore Stoke Poges Church meadow where he counted over 100 butterflies; on nearby Stoke Common found lizards, slow worms and snakes; in Burnham

Beeches found insects in old beech trees. This context identifies the author as Peter Tyler himself. Current environmental issues competing for attention in the Parish. Red Kite noted as a dramatic flier given to soaring, turning over in flight as it chases smaller birds while emitting its 'shrill mew'. Striking contrast between the Kite and the ever-present Pigeons.

~Autumn 2020 — Wayfarer: Fox anatomy and behaviour

Detailed examination of a dead dog-fox found on the Bath Road at Taplow — male, probably in its second year; rich reddish-brown fur intermixed with black, white and grey; remarkably bushy tail (brush); measured over three feet nose to tail, stood about 12 inches at the shoulder. Detailed description of fox anatomy, hunting behaviour, evasive tactics when hunted — 'cunning as a fox' well justified by its extraordinary ability to make detours and throw hounds off its scent. Fox hunting and the arguments around it discussed. The fox's remarkable survival instincts and adaptability.

~Autumn 2020 — Wayfarer: UK mammal Red List

Almost a quarter of the UK's 47 native mammals are now at risk of imminent extinction, according to a new university study. 11 mammals on the country's first official Red List, compiled to internationally agreed rules. Critically endangered: Wildcat and Greater Mouse-eared Bat. Threatened: Beaver, Red Squirrel, Water Vole and Grey Long-eared Bat. Vulnerable: Hedgehog, Hazel Dormouse, Orkney Vole, Serotine Bat and Barbastelle Bat. Common theme: for wild animals to flourish, more connected areas of wild landscape are imperative. The report urges creation of wildlife corridors between existing nature reserves.

Dec 2020/Jan 2021 — Wayfarer: Seasonal Cactus (*Schlumbergera*)

Schlumbergera (Christmas Cactus): a flowering houseplant contributing to festive diversity. In the wild, these jungle inhabitants live in moist leaf debris in the clefts of tree branches in South American rainforests. Best kept under indoor conditions approximating their natural habitat. A good-sized plant grows to about 12 inches height and spread. Densely branching pendant stems of flat green segments. Precise shape varies: some have slightly toothed margins, others nearly smooth. Flowers produced at the tips of the last segment — may vary from white through cream, yellow, salmon, orange, cerise, purple and magenta. Flower tube is noticeably longer than those of other members of the Cactus family.

Autumn 2020 — Brian Clews: Autumn birds on Dorney Common

Invited by Wayfarer. Brian Clews — local ornithologist, published author and expert on wildlife — was scheduled as the speaker at the April 2020 DDHS meeting (rescheduled due to COVID). Autumn is one of two seasons when untold millions of birds migrate. Dorney Common attracts more than its fair share of these wanderers. Canada and Greylag Geese often on the Common, along with Egyptian Geese; but this November a rare Barnacle Goose arrived. Little Egret increasingly making appearances. Some 150 Teal, having bred in Euro-Siberia, turned up; joined by Wigeon all the way from Iceland. A Black-headed Gull ringed as a 3-year-old in Essex in 2016 was sighted. Other notable sojourners: Yellow Wagtail, Wheatear and Short-eared Owl. An early morning walk will witness dozens of Pied Wagtails, numerous Lapwings, passage waders such as Snipe or Dunlin, all accompanied by screeching Ring-necked Parakeets vacating their nearby roost of about 2,000 birds. Dorney Common is always at its most spectacular in autumn.

Autumn 2020 — Wildflowers on Dorney Common (unsigned)

Autumn arrives as foliage turns to gold then bronze. As the garden fades and shrinks, ready for winter slumber, an L-shaped ribbon of the Common wraps around the outside of the garden on two sides. The range of wild flowers has been true to form: bulbs, daffodils, dandelions, daisies and red nettles noted. Bird life active alongside the wildflowers.

2021 | No dedicated nature column — incidental records

From 2021_combined.txt (157KB — smallest year, COVID restrictions). No Nature Notes column. Peter Tyler has stepped down from the DPN editorial board after years of service. Two significant wildlife records in passing.

2021 — Otter confirmed upriver (Georgia at her lock)

Georgia, lockkeeper at a local lock, reports: 'There are otters upriver and last year there was a mink — I haven't seen him this year. And the ducks have thrived!' One bank of the lock is being allowed to 'turn wild', with flowers planted to encourage bees and other insects. Squires' donation of plants tended by Georgia herself. A significant Otter record, confirming presence upriver.

2021 — Thames Water rewilding / wildflower project, Marsh Lane

Thames Water are planning a wildflower and tree planting project on the Marsh Lane boreholes field. The land will remain fenced but be open to locals to enjoy. Planting due to commence at the end of November with help from Maydencroft for larger trees and local volunteers for the wildflower planting. Note: Peter Tyler stepped down from the DPN editorial board after years of service — acknowledged with gratitude.

2022 | Thames Water rewilding; Peter Tyler obituary; garden wildlife

From 2022_combined.txt. No Nature Notes column. Landmark year: Peter Tyler died 21 June 2022. Thames Water rewilding project at Dorney Reach Marsh Lane field begins. DDHS garden visit reveals exceptional biodiversity. Rich rewilding debate in the letters.

Dec 2021 / Jan 2022 — Rewilding in Dorney Reach

On 3rd December 2021, busy activity spotted in the Thames Water boreholes field on Marsh Lane — the first planting session of a significant rewilding project. Team from Ecosulis (environmental consultants commissioned by Thames Water in 2020 to develop a 'pocket rewilding vision'), Brown and Carroll (supplying 12,000 trees), Becky Elliott (Thames Water Biodiversity Manager) and a small band of local volunteers. Initial activity concentrated at the Marsh Lane perimeter: Blackthorn whips planted. Further planting to include Oak, Rowan, Crab Apple, Lime, Elder and Dog Rose across the 22-hectare site. The vision emphasises the site's recent heritage as a grazing area; since grazing ended, nature 'has started to go its own way' but without intervention the site will succumb to dense scrub in 10–15 years of limited biodiversity value. The intention is to steer natural processes to create 'a rich and dynamic rewilding area'. Local voices raised the question: has the project looked at Peter Tyler's biodiversity survey? Before the rewilding project, the field was known to support: Roe Deer, Foxes, Rabbits, Badgers, Harvest Mice, Slow Worms, Grass Snakes, Pheasants, hunting Owls and other birds of prey. Calls for pond creation; consideration given to soil disturbance by badgers already visiting. Water noted as an attractor for wildlife.

2022 — Peter Tyler: obituary and tribute

Peter Tyler, 2 August 1935 – 21 June 2022. Tribute based on the eulogy delivered by his son Gerald. Peter: apiarist, artist, biologist, bassist, tuba player, husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Born in Slough; parents Sydney (engineering draftsman) and Dorothy (formerly of rural Norfolk). From boyhood he observed and collected insect specimens in the fields and woods of Stoke Poges and Windsor. Also learned the tuba and later the double bass with the Boys' Brigade. After Slough Grammar School, joined the Pest Infestation Control Laboratory in Slough as Laboratory Technician. National service spent playing music with the Royal Signals Band. Returned to continue his education as a biologist, becoming a specialist. Author of the Natural History of Dorney Parish (2000, updated 2018). Described as 'the great naturalist of Dorney'. A friend and inspiration to many.

2022 — DDHS garden visit: 13 butterfly species, 65 bird species, Water Vole

DDHS garden visit to a locally notable garden. The party admired diverse areas of light and shade; an oriental garden inspired by the owner's visits to Japan; a wild garden area with a damp meadow and a bog meadow to encourage butterflies and birds. 13 butterfly species and 65 bird species had been spotted in the garden. Endangered Water Vole had made its home here — shades of Water Rat in the book sharing a name with the garden ('Wind in the Willows' being the inspiration). Even slug control was humane — gravel paths and resident Mallard Ducks.

2023 | Andrew Oliver — Nature Notes column begins; Peter Tyler legacy

From 2023_combined.txt. Andrew Oliver ('Olly'), introduced mid-year as the new Nature Notes columnist. 5 nature articles. Kristina Perkins continues seasonal columns. Major Peter Tyler legacy article published. Dorney Lake ecology survey. Editor's appeal for a Nature Notes volunteer confirmed the gap before Olly began. Olly lives in Dorney Reach; his garden backs onto the Thames Water rewilding field.

2023 — Andrew Oliver: Bats (article 1 — rescue and roost)

Towards the end of June the previous year, Olly found a bedraggled bat in his toilet bowl at 6am — a brown blob pathetically flapping soaked wings. He scooped it out with a slotted spoon and put it in a shoebox on a tea towel. The Bat Conservation Trust hotline had a volunteer from Reading call back within 15 minutes; she referred him to Helen, a bat specialist in Eton Wick. Helen arrived the same day, identified the bat as a female Soprano Pipistrelle — Britain's smallest bat — weighing 3.6g, which she fattened to 4.2g on 48 mealworms in one day. Named Bathsheba. Two more grounded bats found subsequently: Sofia (on the sofa) and Frenchie (outside the patio doors). Two uninjured bats also flew around the children's bedrooms. Helen and bat experts from the Trust confirmed the bats were roosting in the eaves outside the bedroom window, not inside the house. The final bat count that season: 135 from the eaves roost, with 4 bats leaving the wooden bat boxes. Olly notes that a cottage in Cookham has over 500. This year's bats have returned; custom nets purchased for open windows.

2023 — Andrew Oliver: Bats (article 2 — monitoring)

16 bats counted in late April. However, monitoring through May was interrupted by work and a cycling trip to Scotland. On returning, two evenings of bat counts recorded zero activity — unsettling. Eventually confirmed the bats were still in residence. The article reflects on the uncertainty of wildlife monitoring and the unpredictability of wild animals.

2023 — Andrew Oliver: Garden wildlife inventory

Olly has made his garden as nature-friendly as possible: native trees and hedging, large areas of unmown meadow full of native flowers, a pond that is 'a big wildlife magnet'. The Thames Water pocket rewilding field behind his garden credited with making the area more bat-friendly by providing insect-rich scrub. Garden wildlife recorded: Owls, Badgers, Foxes, Grass Snakes, Slow Worms, Stag Beetles, Sparrowhawks and Treecreepers. Less celebrated wildlife cherished: Bees nesting in bee boxes, Newts and Dragonfly larvae in the pond. Urges everyone in Dorney to find space in their garden for nature.

2023 — Andrew Oliver: Wildlife and Scotland cycling trip

Non-bat local wildlife: Slow Worms found nestling on paving slabs under a pool heater cover (coppery gleaming skin). Red Kites soaring regularly above. A Robin following Olly around the patio when expected mealworms haven't appeared. Wet May producing abundant wildflower growth: Teasel and Foxglove seedlings colonising a veggie bed; Oxeye Daisy, Knapweed, Birds-foot Trefoil, pink and white Campion, Viper's Bugloss, Yellow Rattle and purple-blue Cranesbill straining for sunlight in the meadows. Scotland cycling trip on the Ardnamurchan peninsula and Isle of Mull: Golden Eagle (confirmed by a tweed-clad, binocular-equipped local); Sea Otters playing in the nearshore, rolling through waves and ducking under kelp; Gannets diving into the Sound from a vantage point on Iona. The dreaded midge was a constant menace in wooded, damp areas.

2023 — Andrew Oliver: Rewilding philosophy

Rewilding debate: sparked by a visit to Embercombe, Devon. Disagrees that rewilding is threatening — for him it means choosing native flowers, log piles, bee nesting sites and ponds, never using pesticides or inorganic fertilisers, while still mowing, clipping and growing veg. 'Human curated gardens for the benefit of wildlife' is his preferred framing. Wolves re-establishing in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Germany and France — living alongside human populations. Hope expressed for Lynx reintroduction in the Cairngorms. Using the Merlin bird ID app: Regular garden birds identified (Robin, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Greenfinch, Goldfinch) along with rarely seen ones (Coal Tit, Dunnock, Wren, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Treecreeper, Goldcrest). A Song Thrush fledgling found on the Thames towpath — bewildered, mother cheeping frantically in trees above. 'I can identify Blackcap birdsong virtually guaranteed anytime I walk down the Thames towpath past the black metal sign that marks the left turn to Dorney Lake.'

2023 — Andrew Oliver: Rewilding training; Boveney Court Farm proposal

Thames Water pocket rewilding field update: an insect house has been erected. Most trees planted the previous year did not survive the summer drought. Calls for pond creation (originally in the plans) and path maintenance for dog walkers. Olly joined the UK's first nature recovery/rewilding training course at Embercombe in Devon; the final project involves finding land and forming a recovery plan. Appeal for local landowners willing to discuss dedicating land to nature recovery, overseen by leading UK experts. Suggestion: instead of building houses on Boveney Court Farm, Eton College could rewild it and benefit from new natural capital incentives. Wild Beavers in Oxfordshire and an Ealing enclosure noted — question whether South Bucks release is possible or inevitable.

2023 — Dorney Lake ecology (Lee, Grounds Manager)

Interview with Lee, Dorney Lake's grounds manager. The Nature Conservation Area is now 'secluded shelter, feeding and breeding grounds for wildlife' providing 'diverse habitats of

grassland, hedgerows, spinneys and wetland supporting a wide range of flowering plants, insects, amphibians, mammals, wildfowl and other birds.’ Key statistics: over 350 types of flora identified around the lake; 140 separate bird species sighted; the waters (all 350 million gallons) are home to 60,000 Perch and 72,000 Green Tench. The Lake is fed by underground aquifers percolating through a natural gravel filter from the River Thames — no artificial filling. Fish present without any stocking — origins still not fully explained. Sheep grazing the wetlands which ebb and flow with rainfall.

2023 — Celebrating Peter Tyler’s Timeless Legacy

Major tribute article: Peter Tyler (1935–2022) described as ‘the great naturalist of Dorney’. In 2000 he produced ‘The Natural History of Dorney’, updated 2018, in collaboration with several kindred spirits. The parish described as forming a north-south wildlife corridor; 400 species of trees, plants and shrubs identified in the parish. DPN commits to printing extracts of Peter Tyler’s comments and vision over coming months. Peter Tyler described as ‘a tireless advocate for the environment; his meticulous observations, unwavering commitment and boundless enthusiasm for the preservation of Dorney’s genetic heritage are a source of inspiration.’

2024 | Andrew Oliver — formal Nature Notes column throughout the year

From 2024_combined.txt. Andrew Oliver writes Nature Notes in every issue. Rich column: Red Kite relationship; Little Owl breeding success; bat DNA research; hedgehog concern; Kingfisher; beavers; hedge laying; Merlin app records; glyphosate campaign.

Jan 2024 — Andrew Oliver: Tawny Owl and Red Kite

Returning from holiday in the French Alps, awake at 5am, Andrew heard a Tawny Owl calling for almost an hour in the Thames Water field — the first time over the festive period. Heard several times that week; also heard by neighbour Theo. Plans to erect Tawny Owl boxes in autumn to attract a breeding pair. The regular Red Kite roosts at the top of a big Black Locust (false acacia) tree in neighbour Adam’s garden — believed to have been planted by the late Ralph Liney; a North American tree, not native, but providing good shelter and roosting opportunities. The Kite sometimes calls and follows Olly down the garden, attracted by occasional offerings of liver and chicken carcasses. Family from Scotland are horrified by the Red Kite feeding.

Spring 2024 — Andrew Oliver: Little Owl box; trail cameras; Toad Patrol

Neighbour Theo evicted a Grey Squirrel from the Little Owl box and upgraded the box with metalwork to prevent re-entry. Little Owls, if they adopt the box, lay 3–5 eggs towards the end of April; incubation about a month; young fledge at 5–6 weeks; tend to return to the same site year after year. Trail camera footage: Red Kite swooped down 10 seconds after Olly dropped liver bait; several kite couples seen fighting in the sky and over the garden, attacking each other’s talons — possibly a spring mating ritual. Foxes on the trail cam at night; reports of two dead foxes on Dorney Common caused concern. The Henley Toad Patrol had helped 11,068 Toads, 406 Frogs and 185 Newts cross the A4155. Olly has Newts and Toads in his garden pond — tiny newtlets and eggs attached under leaves. No frogs or spawn seen.

Spring 2024 — Andrew Oliver: Book launch ‘Shadow of the Wolf’ (Derek Gow)

Attended launch at Conway Hall, Bloomsbury for ‘Shadow of the Wolf’ by rewilding champion Derek Gow. Gow’s argument: Wolves were unfairly demonised and extirpated; as a civilised society we should have space for their return as an essential apex predator to control the abundant and growing deer population. Only 43 people have been killed by wolves in Europe

in the last 50 years vs 25 people in the UK killed by cows in 20 years. If Holland and Belgium can live with wolves, why can't the UK? Italy has the Italian wolf, two varieties of Brown Bear and the Eurasian Lynx. Little Owls declining in Bucks — BTO contacts; heartening to see successful breeding nearby. The Thames Water rewilding field credited as providing excellent habitat cover and forage for the Little Owls.

Summer 2024 — Andrew Oliver: Little Owl breeding success; Little Egret; Red Kite feeding debate

Little Owl chicks confirmed in the box — at least two, possibly three, with wee heads bobbing in the entrance. A magnificent Barn Owl started stalking the box; a friend reassured Olly the chicks were probably too big to be taken. Strong healthy-looking chick emerged and called to parents. Little Owls are declining in Bucks (BTO data from Theo's contact) so the successful breeding here is particularly heartening. Meanwhile, on a river boat trip in the Bangkok Klongs, Little Egrets seen (and monitor lizards cruising the river banks). On return, a Little Egret on the Jubilee River — the first time in 15 years living in Dorney Reach that Olly had seen one there; Theo says he often sees one on the Common near Boveney. Little Egrets started expanding range from France in the mid-1990s. Red Kite debate: a Nextdoor thread complained about kites stealing picnic food; the RSPB advises against supplemental feeding but Olly defends it, noting kites are natural scavengers who historically stole from market stalls.

Summer 2024 — Andrew Oliver: Bat DNA research; glyphosate campaign; Newt

Bat researcher Hannah came to sample bat droppings over 3 nights; results to include DNA analysis to reveal the exact bat species, insect species population and recordings of other species nearby. Nightly bat counts varied between 2–7. Neighbour Theo found a young Newt in his vegetable patch. Bucks Council decision to spray all pavements with glyphosate — toxic to aquatic life if it enters watercourses. Olly emailed a complaint; the Council replied that glyphosate is used 'correctly and in accordance with guidance'. Olly cites: Monsanto has settled over 100,000 Roundup (glyphosate) lawsuits, paying out about \$11 billion as of May 2022.

Summer 2024 — Andrew Oliver: Beavers in Scotland; Dorney Lake wildflowers

Holiday in Aberfeldy, Scotland: visited beaver-created ponds. Himalayan Balsam proliferating everywhere around the beaver wetlands — invasive but popular with Bees; Beavers eat it noisily. Approximately 2,000 wild Beavers living in the Forth and Tay catchments. Hope expressed for wild Beaver releases in South Bucks under the new Labour administration. Dream: Beavers and their kits frolicking in the Jubilee River. Dorney Lake visit: a small area now given over to wildflowers — initial stages of establishment, bordered by cottage garden species that attract insects alongside native wildflowers. Encouraging to see this development.

Autumn 2024 — Andrew Oliver: Hedgehog; Kingfisher; Red Kite; Newt

Kingfisher seen on a dog walk — 'distinct flash of blue zooming over the murky Thames'. Red Kite: two perched on a tall Poplar with Starlings, calling loudly. A tiny baby Newt found under a flowerpot — flowerpot returned to protect the Newt's home. A flattened Hedgehog found on Huntercombe Lane South — ambivalent: a sign of a healthy local population, or the last one? UK Hedgehog numbers have halved in a decade; a nationwide strategy has just been launched. British Hedgehogs introduced to New Zealand in the 1870s are now thriving invasively at 2–8 per hectare, threatening native invertebrates, lizards and ground-dwelling birds. Garden tidy-up advice: leave log piles, leaf mounds and grass clippings; no pesticides; holes in fences to allow hedgehogs to move around.

Winter 2024 — Andrew Oliver: Hedge laying; Merlin app records; birds nest

Olly and Josh carry out hedge laying — cutting Maple, Hawthorn and Dog Rose; thicker trunks set aside for firewood or a wildlife-friendly ‘stumpery’ or log pile. Hedge laying creates a livestock-proof barrier and dense habitat for nesting Blackbirds, Wrens, Robins and Dunnocks. Bird feeders busy throughout as various tits, finches, woodpeckers, parakeets and squirrels visited. Merlin birdsong app picks up: Hawfinch, Bullfinch and Blackpoll Warbler (a North American bird capable of trans-Atlantic migration — query whether Merlin was reliable on this occasion). A perfect round bird’s nest found inside a buddleia. Neighbour Theo found a bird’s nest intertwined in a handmade kindling basket in his shed. Olly’s wish: that reshaping the garden will create nesting sites for garden birds next spring as ‘the sap starts to rise and everything buds up and life springs into action once again.’

2025 | Andrew Oliver — ‘Wild Dorney’ Nature Notes column (intermittent)

Andrew Oliver (‘Olly’) continues the Nature Notes column, increasingly titled ‘Wild Dorney’. Columns for February, April, June, September and November 2025, plus a December rewilding update. No standard column ran in May, July or October (the October issue instead records Olly presenting a show award to John Akerman at the Horticultural Society Annual Show on 6 September). Each column opens with a pop-music conceit before turning to local wildlife. Olly lives on Harcourt Road, Dorney Reach; his garden backs onto the Thames Water rewilding field, and his neighbour Theo is a frequent collaborator.

Feb 2025 — Andrew Oliver: Lynx reintroduction; winter garden birds

Prompted by national headlines that four Lynx had been illegally released — then recaptured — in the Cairngorms near Kingussie, Olly restated his support for reintroducing the Eurasian Lynx, one of several apex predators no longer present in the UK. He pushed back on the BBC’s passive line that they ‘died out’ over 1,000 years ago: it was hunting, persecution and habitat destruction that extirpated them. There are no records of Lynx attacking humans in European countries where they persist; conflict with sheep is minor and offset by compensation (in Norway, claimed sheep losses far exceed what the ~400 mature Lynx could take), set against the UK’s ~32 million sheep. The released animals appeared tame and had likely been dumped by an illegal keeper; one died soon after capture — not, Olly stressed, the way to manage an apex-predator reintroduction. Lynx would help control out-of-control Roe Deer, and legal, community-supported efforts are underway. Winter wildlife: Theo saw a Smew up by the Jubilee (a first for Olly); a Green Woodpecker on the lawn and a Great Spotted Woodpecker on the birch simultaneously; a Tawny Owl heard before Christmas; an unidentified owl on an early-hours drive to Heathrow. A half-hour January Merlin survey at the bottom of the garden picked up Ring-necked Parakeets, roosting Red Kites (whose calls Merlin never registers — Olly had upgraded their treats to Gressingham duck livers over the festive period), Robin, Starlings, the full suite of Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed Tits, Song Thrush, Magpie, Jackdaw, Chiffchaff, Crow, Dunnock, Goldfinch, Blackbird, Redwing, Wren, House Sparrow and Rook, plus Kingfisher, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Heron overhead.

Apr 2025 — Andrew Oliver: Beavers licensed for release; roe deer; spring awakening

Opening on Gladys Knight’s Bond theme ‘Licence to Kill’, Olly celebrated the UK government’s approval — after years of research and consultation — of a licence to release Beavers into the wild in England, a keystone species hunted to extinction in Britain some 400 years ago for fur, meat and castoreum, whose damming creates wetland habitat and delivers flood-control, water-quality and even drought- and wildfire-mitigation benefits. He noted licensed wild releases already underway in Scotland and perhaps 500 Beavers in English enclosures or ‘beaver-

bombed' sites such as the River Otter in Devon, and applauded two Tay Beavers translocated to Little Sea, Purbeck. He has contacted the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust to ask whether they are applying for a local release, hoping wild Beavers might one day reach the Jubilee River with landowners' support. On exploding UK Deer numbers — which do need controlling — he was nonetheless delighted to meet four Roe Deer on Harcourt Road one Friday night, unfazed by his van's headlights. Writing on the evening of 8 March after a day pruning hedges before nesting season (son Finlay's first turn at the mower), he recorded his pair of Little Owls preparing to nest, though a cheeky Parakeet was also eyeing their box (Theo's photo), plus his first bumblebees, ladybird and butterflies of the year (Large White, Red Admiral and two Commas), and Red Kites, Pheasants, Robins, Song Thrush, Blackbird and assorted tits and finches, with Merlin adding Chiffchaff, Redwing, Linnet, Siskin, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Firecrest, Skylark, and Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers.

Jun 2025 — Andrew Oliver: Horticultural Society talk; hedgehog decline; owls; cat predation

Olly gave a well-received talk on biodiversity to the Dorney Horticultural Society, describing the parish's mosaic of habitats and how residents can improve it for nature. The audience was particularly energised by the decline of hedgehogs: the Big Hedgehog Map shows no sightings at all in Dorney parish. Olly has seen none alive since a desiccated hedgehog trapped in his fence when the family moved to Harcourt Road in 2008; neighbour Theo had video footage up to 2014 but nothing since — Olly wonders whether the M4 'smart' motorway works finished them off. He and Louise Whaley have vague plans to engage the community to encourage, save or even reintroduce hedgehogs, and acquired hedgehog tracking tunnels for his birthday (expecting mostly rat prints). After the Horti talk, Kristina Perkins reported Barn Owls on Dorney Common and Merlin-detected Common Redstarts; the following week Olly picked up Redstarts in his own garden for the first time and a Short-eared Owl (no evidence for years), plus a Common Reed Warbler and a Kingfisher on a towpath walk. Dorney thus hosts Barn, Tawny, Short-eared and Little Owls. The Little Owls were again breeding in the Marsh Lane box (at least two eggs, then two chicks); a cat appeared on the webcam, triggering alarm calls from inside. Olly notes cats kill an estimated 27 million birds and up to 200 million animals a year in the UK, and recommends bell or 'BirdSafe' collars and keeping cats in at dawn and dusk.

Sep 2025 — Andrew Oliver: Little Owl ringing; bats; badgers; butterflies and moths

In June, Theo arranged for two ringers from the BTO — who run the Bisham Barn Owl Group and had just recorded their most successful Barn Owl fledging year ever — to ring the Little Owl chicks. Every other Little Owl nest they monitor had failed, so ours was of particular interest. Paul from the BTO caught both chicks (the second coaxed with effort from the awkward box) and Olly and Theo watched, entranced, as they were ringed; the parents returned with worms soon after. Paul observed that Little Owls thrive around Dorney thanks to abundant worm-rich foraging — the rewilding Thames Water field and manure-rich local fields — and urged landowners to manage soils regeneratively. At home, Soprano Pipistrelles remain healthy: a few in Olly's bat box, up to 12 in Theo's, and 20–30 (down from a peak of 170) in the eaves maternity roost. Theo filmed three adult Badgers at the bottom of the gardens, which may explain the missing hedgehogs — Badgers predate them, and Virginia Sylvester has seen likely Badger-killed remains; the local Badger population may have risen after displacement by the M4 works. An excellent butterfly summer: 20+ Gatekeepers most days (addicted to wild marjoram), abundant Small Whites, and occasional Red Admirals, Peacocks, Large Whites, Brimstone and Comma; Jersey Tiger moths on the towpath (and on Louise Whaley's front door) and Speckled Woods; a Hummingbird Hawk-moth fed on the buddleia for twenty minutes. Olly recommends the Big Butterfly Count app.

Nov 2025 — Andrew Oliver: Autumn colour; buzzard; kingfisher; Embercombe new species

An autumn reverie: Forestry England expected an especially vibrant display, the warm sunny summer having loaded leaves with extra sugar; Olly noticed Horse Chestnut leaves on the towpath turning from lime green to terracotta and falling as early as September. On towpath dog walks he heard and twice saw what he took to be a juvenile Buzzard (once roosting within five metres, eye to eye before flying off), probably from a nest on the Bray side, and twice saw the turquoise flash of a Kingfisher across the Thames — sightings that reassure him the river is healthy enough to support the small fish they feed on. On a weekend at the Embercombe rewilding project in Devon he encountered several species new to him: an adult Dormouse, the field bird's-nest fungus *Cyathus olla*, and a Noctule bat.

Dec 2025 — Andrew Oliver: Thames Water Borehole Field rewilding update

Rather than a standard column, Olly contributed a detailed update on biodiversity works at the Thames Water Borehole Field (the Marsh Lane rewilding field). Thames Water, recognising scope to improve the site, ran a tender to appoint a principal contractor for biodiversity enhancement: roughly half the field is to be left as scrub and regenerating trees and the rest managed as hay meadow, with brash and dead-hedge piles from the cut scrub. The incoming contractor will consult the community and stakeholders before drawing up a detailed nature-recovery design to meet Thames Water's biodiversity performance targets; beyond grassland management, nothing further has yet been decided. The contractor had cleared significant fly-tipping and fitted a new gate at the Dorney Reach Road entrance to deter it. Thames Water confirmed by email that a trained ecologist acted as ecological clerk of works throughout, with a reptile method statement and a site-specific Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement; suitable habitat was hand-searched for reptiles before works, which were carried out before hibernation conditions under a watching brief. On the tree-guard litter Olly had complained of, Thames Water said its guards are biodegradable rather than plastic, that brittle guards entangled in tall vegetation were impractical to remove until cutting, and that a full litter-pick would follow. Olly stressed that community involvement is an essential element of any successful rewilding project. (The Parish Council separately reported a new wildlife sign on Marsh Lane beyond Dorney Lake warning drivers of frequent Deer.)

2026 | Andrew Oliver — 'Wild Dorney' Nature Notes column

Columns recovered for February, April and June 2026. No column ran in March or May (the March issue carries a parish-history retrospective that recalls the historic 'Naturalist' and 'Wayfarer' columns). The 'Wild Dorney' title is now standard. The June 2026 issue was a pre-publication draft at time of extraction.

Feb 2026 — Andrew Oliver: Winter carcasses; field management; Merlin survey; owl boxes

Opening on Queen's 'Greatest Hits' as a cross-generational album, Olly turns to the hard winter for non-hibernating wildlife. December brought much evidence of lean times: a square metre of Badger fur strewn across the Thames Water field (no carcass), Deer bones found by the dogs, a partial Muntjac head and a headless rat in his garden (likely dropped by a Kite), and a dismembered pigeon — probably the work of two or three Buzzards circling overhead, or a Peregrine. Having got over the shock of seeing tractors in the Thames Water field, he has come to appreciate the open spaces created and the contrasting management's promise of a habitat mosaic — though he resolves to clear the chopped-up 'biodegradable' tree guards now strewn across the grassland. Festive-period Merlin surveys showed the field's bird diversity as wide as ever: Meadow Pipit, Jackdaw, Blackbird, Magpie, Redwing, Robin, Siskin, Chiffchaff, Pheasant, Wren, Blackcap, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Goldcrest, Carrion Crow, Redpoll, Starling, House

Sparrow, Raven, Kestrel, Rook, Goldfinch, Dunnock, Parakeets, Red Kite, Song Thrush, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Cetti's Warbler, Peregrine Falcon, Buzzard, Greenfinch, Fieldfare, Firecrest, Barn Owl, Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Bullfinch and Skylark — with Merlin also throwing up improbable Western Tanager, Great-tailed Grackle and Allen's Hummingbird on Christmas Day. With Paul from the BTO, Olly and Theo put up more owl boxes: the original off Marsh Lane, one at the edge of the Thames Water field, two at Barge Farm (Julia and her husband helping secure the landlord's permission), and a Tawny Owl box in the large Black Locust in neighbour Adam's garden, originally planted by the late Ralph Liney. The column closes with the annual reminder to finish hedge-trimming before the 1 March–31 August bird nesting season.

Apr 2026 — Andrew Oliver: Pine Marten; Marsh Tit; bats; the water industry; parakeets in Rome

After an endlessly wet February gave way to a fine spring day, Olly transplanted Foxgloves into wilder areas and cut the grass for the first time. The headline record: a dead male Pine Marten found in a Marlow hedge and posted to the Wild Marlow Facebook group, where experts were fairly convinced of the identification — there has been no evidence of Pine Martens surviving in Buckinghamshire since they became functionally extinct in England around 1900 (lost woodland habitat, Victorian gamekeeper persecution, fur hunting). Whether a lone release or a sign of a local population, Olly welcomes the prospect of martens back in the Bucks landscape, noting they can benefit Red Squirrels by preying on the less wary non-native Greys. His Merlin app detected a Marsh Tit in the rewilding field for the first time — a red-listed species down over 80% since the 1960s — favouring the mature deciduous habitat the spectacular Blackthorn blossom will help provide. Theo's camera caught a Little Owl inspecting last year's box, though no nesting activity yet. His own bats had not returned to their usual box and soffit roosts, but Peter Bowman sent a photo of a Soprano Pipistrelle emerging from his roof — prompting Olly to wonder whether his summer bats overwinter there. He reflects on Channel 4's 'Dirty Business' exposé of the privatised water industry and the Environment Agency: England is the only nation with a fully privatised water industry, over £145 billion extracted since 1989 while infrastructure was underfunded (he cites Thatcher's prescient 1989 UN climate speech), and points readers to sewagemap.co.uk — both his sons have occasionally fallen ill after kayaking the Thames at Hurley and Boulton Lock. Finally, watching the Six Nations from Rome, he recognised the calls of Rose-ringed Parakeets in the Villa Borghese and heard Monk Parakeets (new to him) via Merlin.

Jun 2026 — Andrew Oliver: Flood risk and beavers; warblers; Attenborough centenary

Framed by the Rolling Stones' 'Gimme Shelter', Olly turns to flood risk — the single thing that would make him leave Dorney Reach, where he initially could find no insurer willing to offer flood cover on Harcourt Road. Though a dry spring (Southern England rainfall down 23% in April per the Met Office) kept flooding off his mind, he warns that climate change will likely bring heavier and more frequent rainfall, wetter winters, saturated soils, rising seas and more unpredictable river flows. His proposed remedy: Beavers, whose dams slow flows and whose wetlands store and slowly release water like a sponge, reducing peak discharge and downstream flooding. With growing wild populations in Kent, Somerset and the Cotswolds and a new Natural England wild-release licensing route, he hopes natural expansion (or a local release) will eventually bring them to the Thames and the Jubilee River, and asks whether residents and landowners would support this. Spring Merlin surveys revealed Dorney holds nearly two-thirds of the UK's warbler species — Garden, Willow, Cetti's and Sedge Warblers plus Greater Whitethroat, Blackcap, Firecrest, Goldcrest and Chiffchaff (the last singing constantly from the power cables along the rewilding field). The Little Owls only briefly visited the box before moving on; Redstarts showed on Merlin though he has yet to see one. He closes

on David Attenborough's centenary: a life spent sharing a love of nature across a period in which monitored wildlife populations fell by 73% on average (Tigers from 100,000 in 1900 to 5,574; North Atlantic Right Whales to 372; Sumatran Orangutans down over 80%) — yet with recoveries that prove restoration is possible: Humpback Whales back to 135,000, European Bison from 54 to over 7,000, and Eurasian Beavers from 1,200 to 1.5 million across Europe.

— *End of current entries. Coverage complete 1962–June 2026. Continue adding entries below.*

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