



Editorial Panel: Helen Ikin, Steve Woodward, Jim Graham.

Hon. Secretary. Sue Graham, 5 Lychgate Close, Cropston, Leics. LE7 7HU. Tel: 0116-2366474

## NATURAL HISTORY IN CHURCHYARDS

Churchyards are well worth exploring for their flora and fauna. Helen Ikin and myself have confirmed this on our many visits to local churchyards over the last few years. They are (usually) pleasant places to wander slowly, looking for wild flowers among the headstones, trying to identify the planted trees, examining the lichens and mosses on the walls and watching mining bees at their excavated nests. Inside the church itself one can often find evidence of more creatures: birds (e.g. Swallow nests in the porch), butterflies at the windows (or dead on the window-sills), bats (droppings) and occasionally Death Watch Beetles (appeals for restoration funds)!

Although it was the prospect of bees that first drew us into churchyards, other aspects of churchyard wildlife have distracted us, especially the flowering plants. The reason is that the *Atlas 2020* project (mentioned in previous *Heritage* editions) requires records of flowering plants across the counties, and churchyards, being fairly evenly dispersed and easily accessible, seemed suitable places to look. Common and widespread species of grassland, woodland, disturbed ground and rock surfaces can be expected in a churchyard, but we have turned up a few surprises and even first county records.

All our records have been submitted to the Record Centre, LRERC. If, during a visit, we meet someone connected with the church, we always offer to send our results to the vicar or churchwardens. In 2013 we determined to visit all the churchyards in Leicestershire and Rutland

### IN THIS EDITION

#### CLASSIFIED RECORDS

- Mammals Page 4
- Birds Page 5
- Reptiles and Amphibians Page 8
- Fish Page 9
- Dragonflies and Damselflies Page 10
- Butterflies Page 11
- Moths Page 12
- Beetles Page 13
- Other Insects Page 14
- Plants and Ferns Page 14
- Other Records Page 14
- Weather Page 14
- Acknowledgements Page 16



*Long Whatton church (All Saints) produced a good list of 72 vascular plant species our visit on 22 April, including Goldilocks Buttercup and Hoary Plantain.*  
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and we now have in excess of 27,000 records from 349 sites (including a few cemeteries). Although we have been to virtually all churchyards, many visits were not in the flowering season, so it will be some while before we are satisfied with our coverage. In the meantime, here are a few highlights.



*Meadow Saxifrage at Glenfield (St. Peter), 4 May.*  
© Steve Woodward

We had visited Glenfield (St. Peter) a couple of times, but a spring-time visit in 2018 added some special flowers, namely Goldilocks Buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus* and Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*. Neither is common. This is the only churchyard where we have found both – better still, the churchyard occupies two tetrads (recording grid squares) so each species will generate two dots on the map! Finding these and many other plants requires a sympathetic mowing regime – other churchyards may well harbour interesting plants but are mown too frequently for them to flower.

The two plants mentioned in the previous paragraph are quite likely “native” and genuinely wild here (although introduction cannot be ruled out, of course). Many plant species in churchyards are certainly introduced, but they sometimes become naturalised and spread without assistance. One such plant is Bird-in-a-bush *Corydalis solida*. The pink flowers of this herbaceous plant really do look like birds, all facing the middle of the bush. It can be found at Rotherby churchyard (All Saints) but it has spread to nearby gardens (or the other way round?) and qualifies as “wild” in the Atlas 2020 survey.

Churchyards abound in “rock” surfaces (including bricks, mortar and concrete) – not only the church itself, but the boundary wall and



*Bird-in-a-bush is an attractive garden plant, but seems to have gone rampant at Rotherby (All Saints).*  
© Steve Woodward

the headstones too. They become colonised by lichens of various growth forms – powdery, scaly or bushy. These light-demanding organisms generally grow very slowly, so lichen communities may still be developing after hundreds of years. Churchyards provide suitable substrates that are likely to be undisturbed and free from shading for a long time, so they are important sites for lichen conservation. We can admire the variety of colours and textures that adorn walls and headstones, but naming lichens really requires a specialist. Happily, we know one - so we took Ivan Pedley along to the churchyard at Coleorton (St. John). Ivan found 52 species, mostly on the boundary wall, with more on the church, the headstones and a few on the trees. Ivan has studied most of the local churchyards, so he was able to declare that St. John’s is one of the richest churchyards for lichens in west Leicestershire.

A bird that is supposed to frequent churchyards, according to some books (e.g. Greenoak and Roberts, 1985), is the Spotted Flycatcher. Perhaps we have not been paying due attention to birds, but it was not until 2018 that we actually found one in a churchyard, at Medbourne (St. Giles) on 22 June. It was perching on headstones, dashing out to intercept a fly, then returning to its perch. This is a species that has declined considerably over recent decades (Fray, *et al.* 2009), so perhaps it really is scarce in churchyards now. On the other hand, the Peregrine Falcon is doing well and in 2017 we photographed a bird on Bottesford church (St. Mary), where a nest was monitored by CCTV. Following a tip-off from Jack Perks at his talk last winter, we “trespassed” into

Derbyshire in January to see Hawfinches in a churchyard. To be strictly accurate, we were in the churchyard (Darley Dale, St. Helens) and the birds were just outside it, but close enough to attempt a photograph.

One of the pioneers of Leicestershire botany was Andrew Bloxam (1801-1878), who was Rector of Twycross. During our visit to Twycross (St. James) on 20 June 2018, we wondered how many of the plants we found would have been there in Bloxam's era. The flora of this churchyard was a little unusual, having a number of species associated with acid or heathy soils, namely Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, Creeping Soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, the moss *Dicranum scoparium* and – unique for a Leicestershire churchyard as far as we know - Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*. Perhaps a thin sandy layer in the soil at Twycross gave the area a heathy kind of vegetation – now destroyed by ploughing except in the sanctuary of the churchyard.



*Bristly Millipede (c. 3 mm) on the boundary wall at Stoke Golding (St. Margaret).* © Steve Woodward

Walls may appear to lack animal life, but there are always creatures to be found if one looks hard enough. The Bristly Millipede *Polyxenus lagurus*, being only 2-3 mm long is easily missed but not uncommon. We have reported on its distribution elsewhere (Ikin and Woodward, 2014) and speculated that it feeds on micro-fungi or algae on the wall's surface.

Mites are tiny arachnids, related to spiders. We have seen them, sometimes in astronomic numbers, on church walls. Since attending a Mite identification course this year, we are starting to work out what they are. The red

velvet mites are the most conspicuous, running around on sunlit wall-tops. We are intrigued by this behaviour – why do they do it? There are probably several species involved (including members of the family Trombidiidae) – but they cannot be identified in the field and the specimens are still to be examined. Globular, black, slow-moving Oribatid mites can also be abundant under loose bits of masonry – some from Thornton (St. Peter) and Whetstone (St. Peter) were identified and confirmed as *Phauloppia lucorum*; probably a first county record (as no-one seems to have studied mites).



*Medetera fly with its characteristic stance on Higham on the Hill (St. Peter) church.*

© Steve Woodward

Tiny flies (Diptera) are common on walls, especially long-legged flies that rest on vertical surfaces, facing upwards, and run (rather than fly away) when disturbed. I believe they belong to the genus *Medetera* in the family Dolichopodidae (to be confirmed). They have strange mouthparts (like a horse's nose-bag) and predate smaller invertebrates (d'Assis Fonseca, 1978).

Spiders are all predators, and many of those make a living on church walls. We have not studied them, but spider-hunting wasps (Pompilidae) are within the scope of another of our projects (Aculeates) so we can identify them. On several occasions, such as Osgathorpe (St. Mary) on 31 May 2018, we have witnessed a Pompilid (usually *Dipogon* sp.) carrying a paralysed spider to store in a burrow for its larvae. One cannot but admire these wasps for their audacity to tackle venomous spiders bigger than themselves, and for their strength and stamina to haul them up a vertical wall.

We made a first county record of the solitary bee *Hylaeus signatus* in a Leicester churchyard,

## CLASSIFIED RECORDS

Records submitted for *Heritage* have been checked as far as possible by the writers of the various sections. They have not all been formally validated by County Recorders (as this is not practical on a quarterly basis). Full details of the records are submitted to Leicestershire & Rutland Environmental Records Centre LRERC, County Hall, Glenfield, Leics. LE3 8RA, either as spreadsheets or as scans of paper records. Once validated, selected records will be added to the LRERC database and made accessible to the public.

The original records are archived. All of the older paper records have been deposited at the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, Long Street, Wigston Magna, Leics. LE18 2AH, accession number DE9392. Most pre-2011 paper records are also available on a disc (see *Heritage* 205). Recent paper records will reside with Helen Ikin, until a batch is ready to go to the Record Office.

## MAMMALS

Molehills, evidence of **Moles**, were seen in DAP's Swithland garden throughout quarter and there was activity in neighbouring gardens. Molehills were also recorded from Broughton and Old Dalby, Twycross, Blaston, Priory Farm at Nevill Holt, Huncote, Anstey, Sheepy, Twycross, Marefield, Owston, Harston churchyard, Belvoir, Rothley, playing field at Enderby, Bardon 22 Industrial Estate, Long Clawson, Pickwell, Somerby, Cosby, Ratcliffe, Hallaton, Theddingworth, Tixover and along the Grantham Canal at Redmile and Bottesford.

DAP disturbed a **Common Shrew** in his Swithland garden while emptying the compost bins.

**Brown Hares** were seen at Thurlaston - three in arable field, Twycross one, Somerby four, Belvoir one, bridle path near Belvoir - one running through an arable field, Broughton and Old Dalby one in arable, Brooke three in arable. Hares seem to prefer arable fields where they can nibble the young and succulent growing crop!



A spider-hunting wasp *Dipogon*, looking for a suitable nest site on the wall of Osgathorpe (St. Mary) church, where it will park the spider then prepare the nest before dragging in its prey. She will then lay her egg on the spider and seal the nest.

© Steve Woodward

All Saints in 2016. The church itself is no longer in regular use but the churchyard is partly gardened and partly left to accumulate a wide range of urban weeds. It seems good for nectaring insects. An urban churchyard is entirely appropriate for *Hylaeus signatus*, as it forages pollen from Wild Mignonette and Weld, flowers which are not uncommon on brownfield sites (Falk and Lewington, 2015). The bee is widespread, but thinly – it is designated as Nationally Scarce Nb.

Our churchyard survey follows no “protocol” and we are a little hazy about its objectives – the truth is we do it for enjoyment. Eventually we intend to produce some kind of report, but not before we finish off our other projects!

**Steve Woodward**

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**Rabbits** were noted at Sheepy, Twycross, Wymeswold in Storkit Lane, Belvoir, Narborough, Long Clawson, Somerby, Ratcliffe, Hallaton, Tixover on A47 verge, Redmile, Martinsthorpe, Manton and Brooke. DAP had up to four Rabbits in his Swithland garden this quarter. Rabbits are not usually strictly nocturnal but may become so if disturbed frequently during daylight hours – as at Bradgate where it is unusual to spot a Rabbit in the day although we know from signs that they are there.

**Grey Squirrels** were recorded from Narborough and Cosby. They are certainly more frequent than this, in fact, so common that few people record them!

**Red Foxes** were seen at Twycross - one dead on the road, Bradgate Park ruins enclosure – one ran close by us as we were in the tilt yard at mid-day. He re-appeared ten minutes later. At Cosby, Ratcliffe and Hallaton there was a strong fox smell but we did not see the animals, just excavations in the river bank at Ratcliffe. At Tixover one was dead on the verge of the A47. HS had a fox in her Quorn garden on 14 January and one in the nearby paddock on the 13th. DAP had garden visits from foxes twice at 7 or 8 in the morning and noted one in Kinchley Lane on 1 March – all seen were in lovely condition.

HS reported two **Weasels** crossing the road in front of her car - one near Beacon Hill in late January and the second between Woodhouse and Swithland in mid-February.

There was a dead **Badger** in Swithland on 22 February. Corpses were also noted at Bardon, Twycross and Cosby and a small one on the A47 near Houghton on the Hill. Signs of Badgers were seen by SFW and HI at Broughton and Old Dalby - base of railway embankment, near Copt Oak, Sheepy, Twycross, Somerby, Wymeswold in Storkit Lane, Lubenham- by the GU Canal, Theddingworth, Morcott, Birstall, by the canal near Bottesford and at Redmile.

SFW was lucky enough to glimpse a Rutland **Otter** - brief view of the head swimming in a swollen and murky River Welland, between old and new bridges in the river near Duddington but in Tixover parish.

HS had a **Muntjac** in her Quorn garden for a couple of hours on 13 January and another

visited the paddock nearby on 11 March. DAP watched one by the stream between Rabbits Bridge and Quorn in early February, another was on the roadside near the Brand when SFW passed by on 11 January and there was a lame one near Barrow upon Soar on 22 January. Slots in mud were seen at Grace Dieu Wood, Somerby, Sheet Hedges Wood, Tugby Wood, Redmile, Gunthorpe and Brooke.

PJD found an injured **Roe Deer** in a road at Copt Oak in the snow on 17 March, its legs seemed OK and two young men moved it behind a wall to get it off the road. We hope it recovered.

Helen Ikin

## BIRDS

The extreme weather experienced during the quarter had a serious effect on our birds as it also has with other groups.

**Mute Swan** was recorded from the six main waters with double-figure counts at Groby Pool (41) and Cropston Reservoir (13) in January. A pair, with last year's young still in tow, was at Cropston Reservoir and on the River Lin in Bradgate Park during the quarter. A party of three adult **Whooper Swan** was at Swithland Reservoir on 7 January.

A group of **Pink-footed Goose** was heard flying over Ibstock on 6 January but there were few reports of either Canada or Greylag Goose during the quarter.

Two Shelduck were noted at Swithland Reservoir on 7 January. A drake **Mandarin Duck** was at the same site on the 4th whilst two pairs were noted at Cropston Reservoir on 18 March. The only **Wigeon** reported came from this site on 21 January.

Double-figure counts of **Gadwall** came from three sites with maxima of 98 at Swithland Res on 16 February and 24 at both Hicks Lodge on the 7th and Cropston Reservoir on 17 January. The highest count of **Teal** was just six at both Cropston Reservoir and Groby Pool with one observer noting that "there were not many this winter". Mention was made in 2017 of the lack of numbers of Mallard (172 in 2016 down to 72), well that trend continued with 41 at Albert Village Lake on two dates the highest count. Two

drake **Pintail** were with a female at Groby Pool on 25 March but they did not linger. The same site also had the only records of **Shoveler**, one on 14 January and nine on 25 March. The regular pair of **Red-crested Pochard** was noted at Watermead CP South during the quarter whilst **Pochard** were recorded at three localities the highest count being 28 at Groby Pool on 14 January. The best count of **Tufted Duck** again came from Swithland Reservoir with 78 on 16 February, down on the 125 there in March 2016. Up to four **Goldeneye** were noted at Cropston Reservoir but all other records came from Swithland Reservoir with counts in excess of 20 throughout the quarter.

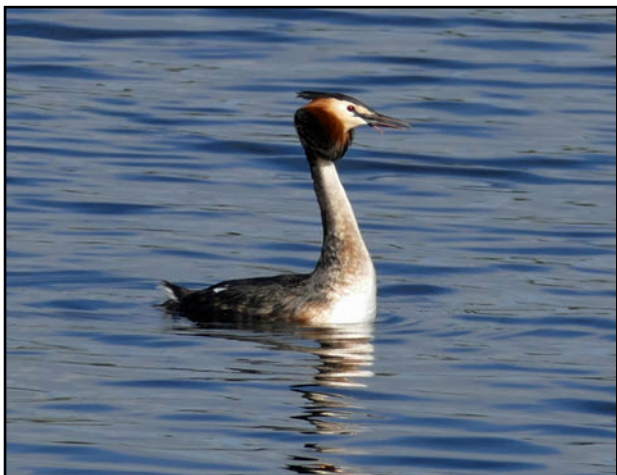
There were few records received for **Red-legged Partridge** and none of **Grey Partridge** with poor numbers of Pheasant also noted.

A juvenile **Black-throated Diver** was at Albert Village Lake between 12 and 26 February.

The best counts of **Cormorant** came from Groby Pool peaking at 48 on 19 January.

A **Cattle Egret**, originally located near Thornton Reservoir on 30 January, was still in the area at the end of February but not seen subsequently. One or two **Little Egret** were noted throughout the quarter. The highest count of **Grey Heron** was eight at Groby Pool on 1 February.

**Little Grebes** were noted at just four sites in small numbers with Albert Village Lake having the only double-figure count with 13 on 18 February. All double-figure counts of **Great Crested Grebe** came from Cropston Reservoir peaking at 17 on 6 January (48 in 2017). A number of displaying pairs were noted from late March.



*Great Crested Grebe © Jim Graham*

One or two **Red Kite** were noted in 14 widespread locations through the quarter, whilst a ring-tailed harrier, most probably **Hen Harrier**, was flying over Ibstock towards Kelham Bridge on 7 February. There were few **Sparrowhawk** records but display was noted at three sites during March. Even **Buzzard** records were low coming from just eight widespread locations (26 in 2017), with pairs displaying at a minimum of four sites. The best count was eight over Hicks Lodge on 7 February. **Kestrel** was recorded at 14 locations mostly found hunting by roadsides. One or two **Peregrine** were at their usual sites but again the majority of records came from Leicester city centre where a pair were regularly located on the Leicester Cathedral nesting platform through the quarter. The live webcams showed that the pair laid eggs on 26 and 29 March. Hopefully they will be more successful this year.

**Water Rail** was noted reported and small numbers of **Moorhen** came from seven sites with the only double-figure count being 14 at Abbey Park on 27 January. Numbers of wintering **Coot** were also low, the largest count being just 48 at Albert Village Lake on 21 January.

The weather was obviously holding up returning waders. A single **Oystercatcher** was at Hicks Lodge on 7 February with two at Albert Village Lake on the 20th, whilst the largest flock of **Lapwing** was 50 at Thornton Reservoir on 14 January. Numbers of **Snipe** were sparse with one or two at just four sites with three at Groby Pool on 7 January. **Woodcock** were located at three locations, all accidentally flushed from roadsides by SFW and HI whilst undertaking surveys. It goes to show that they are out there, just need to be found! A **Black-tailed Godwit** was perched on the ice at Groby Pool on 1 March and probably the same bird was at Thornton Reservoir for the next two days. Two **Redshank** were at Swithland Reservoir on 7 January.

An adult **Kittiwake** was found at Groby Pool on 23 March but it didn't stay. The largest count of **Black-headed Gull** was 2,500 roosting at Cropston Reservoir on 7 January. The same site held 159 **Common Gull** which is the highest number here since 2004. There were few counts of **Lesser Black-backed Gull** and 45 at Albert Village Lake on 18 February was the best total along with 12 **Herring Gull** the same day. There

were two **Yellow-legged Gull** at Albert Village Lake on 18 February and one at Cropston Reservoir on 18 March. What was presumed to be the same **Caspian Gull** was seen at Groby Pool on several dates between 18 January and 1 February. A juvenile **Iceland Gull** was found at Albert Village Lake on 18 February with the same site holding the best count of **Great Black-backed Gull**, 31 on 21 January – a substantial reduction on the 114 in same month in 2017.

Few **Stock Dove** were noted whilst the highest count of **Wood Pigeon** was just 60 at Cropston Reservoir on 21 January. As usual, most **Collared Dove** records came from gardens with ten at Holwell in March the best count.

**Ring-necked Parakeet** are increasing in throughout the county and moving into Charnwood. One was seen regularly around Watermead CP Birstall throughout the quarter with another noted frequently at feeders in Baxter Street, Loughborough.

The only **Barn Owl** was at Castle Hill Park in January, whilst **Little Owl** were at Bradgate Park and calling **Tawny Owl** were heard at four sites through the quarter.

Records of **Green Woodpeckers** came from 14 locations whilst **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** were also at 11, including four gardens.

Few **Magpie** were reported but 17 were in Abbey Park on 27 January and 32 near Birstall on 16 February. One or two **Jay** were reported from five localities. Flocks of **Jackdaw** in excess of 500 were reported at three sites with: 2,000 at Watermead CP Birstall on 27 January, 1,000 at Borough-on-the-Hill on 14 February and 500 at Blaston on 7 January. There were 1,000 **Carrion Crows** reported at Watermead CP Birstall and six **Rookeries** were found with 14 nests at Knaptoft being the largest. One or two **Raven** were reported from seven sites with display at four and a pair carrying sticks to a nest on a pylon near Mountsorrel.

One or two **Goldcrests** were reported from seven locations. There were no significant counts of **Blue, Great or Coal Tits**, and usually, no **Willow Tit** were noted at Kelham Bridge whilst **Marsh Tit** were found at just two sites.

All **Sky Lark** records were of single figures from 15 sites.



*Marsh Tit © Jim Graham*

Records of **Long-tailed Tit** came from 14 widespread sites with 20 at Abbey Park and ten in Quorn the only double-figure counts.

Migrants in general were being held back by the weather and no **Sand Martin** or **House Martin** were seen and resident **Cetti's Warbler** may have also been affected as none were noted in their usual haunts.

Overwintering **Chiffchaff** were few and far between and singing returning migrants were not noted until the end of March. There were just three over-wintering **Blackcaps** reported, all from members' gardens.

One or two **Nuthatch** were seen or heard in a variety of locations with four at Beacon Hill on 7 January the best count. **Treecreeper** was noted at six localities with song heard from 20 March. Most **Wren** records were of singles but three were at Abbey Park on 27 January with song at Cropston Reservoir on 18 February.

A spring movement of at least 1,200 **Starling** was seen moving north over Groby Pool on 25 March. The only other count of note was 300 in a field at Redmile on the 23rd. Most records of **Blackbird** came from gardens, mainly of single figures but 18 were feasting on mealworms and suet pellets in JG's Cropston garden. It was another poor year for flocks of wintering thrushes. The best counts were 700 **Fieldfare** at Holwell on 3 March and 130 **Redwing** at Quorn on 27 January. **Song Thrush** was noted at just five locations with singing at one, whilst records of **Mistle Thrush** came from five.

**Robin** was recorded in 11 locations, mostly gardens, as was **Dunnock**. A pair of **Stonechat** was around the Bradgate Park ruins from 18 to 27 January at least. There were few records for **House Sparrow**, all from gardens, and the



Tree Sparrow © Jim Graham

highest count was 20 at ATO's garden in February. The only records of **Tree Sparrow** came from Holwell.

Unsurprisingly, all **Grey Wagtail** locations involved water, six of which held one or two individuals with three on Cropston Reservoir dam on 6 January. As in 2017, there was no indication of any wintering roosts of **Pied Wagtail** from any of the usual sites during the period and the only notable flock of **Meadow Pipit** was 20 at Groby Pool on 25 February.

The only double-figure count of **Chaffinch** was ten at Holwell on 13 January. Most **Greenfinch** records came from gardens as did **Goldfinch**, the exception being 150 at Longmoor, Ravenstone on 14 January.

Wintering flocks of **Siskin** came from eight locations with counts in excess of 100 from three with maxima: 200 at Groby Pool on 1 January, 140 in DAP's Swithland garden on a number of dates through the period and 100 at Bradgate Park on 10 February. Numbers of **Lesser Redpoll** were much lower with 30 at Longmoor on 14 January the highest count. Attached to the flock was a single **Common Redpoll**. There was just one record of **Linnet**, ten at Groby Pool on 18 January. Two **Crossbill** were seen flying south-east over Swithland Reservoir on 11 February.

Small numbers of **Bullfinch** were noted at just four sites. The national influx of **Hawfinch** reached Charnwood with one or two at four sites, some long-staying. **Yellowhammer** records came from seven although no count exceeded the ten at Newtown Linford on 14 January. Single **Reed Bunting** were in the Groby area during February.

Jim Graham

## REPTILES and AMPHIBIANS

As may be expected during such a long, cold, late spring, sightings of reptiles, amphibians, and fish have been few and far between. However, there were a couple of sightings of reptiles late in the quarter, towards the end of March.

**Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis***: PJD reports that her neighbour in Quorn found a Slow-worm on her garden path on 15 March. It was assumed that the reason this reptile turned up there was because it had been caught by a cat or a bird: nevertheless, the specimen appeared to be unharmed.

**Adder *Vipera berus***: We have two records for this species, once again from comparatively late in the quarter. Both records come from Bradgate Park, where SFW and HI found one specimen on the 16 March, and a second one at a different location in the Park on 26 March.

**Smooth or Common Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris***: We have only one sighting for this amphibian and once again it was quite late in the quarter. PJD reports that on the 23 March three specimens were seen in a neighbour's garden pond - they appeared to be eating the frog spawn.

**Common Toad *Bufo bufo***: PJD reports that on the 20 February she found a single specimen on the path which runs around Springfield Lake - the pond in the centre of the housing estate on the northern side of the village.

**Common Frog *Rana temporaria***: PJD reports that she found a single specimen crossing her lawn, making for a garden pond, on the 20 February. Frogs did not arrive in her garden in force until the 9 March, when approximately six specimens turned up in her own pond, and at least 20 more turned up in a neighbour's pond. Over the next two or three days there was a great deal of activity in both ponds, with large quantities of spawn beginning to appear on the 12 March. PHG reports that there were several specimens present at a garden pond in Warwick Avenue, in Quorn, on the 25 March. On the following day, there were three clumps of spawn present, four on the 27 March, 14 on the 28 March and 16 on the 29 March. PHG adds that a Heron was thought to have eaten





Common Frog © Jim Graham

one clump of spawn on the 27 March. HS, who also lives on that side of Quorn, reports that there were two clumps of spawn in her garden pond on 26 March. Also at the end of the month, on 27th SFW and HI found a frog at Gunthorpe.

PHG adds the following comment concerning Tom Long's Meadow in Quorn: "There were few if any suitable spawning days at the usual spawning time this year and those that arrived early are thought to have been predated by a Grey Heron which was present daily at this time."

All in all, so far, 2018 has not been a very good year for amphibians and reptiles.

**Tony Onions**

## FISH (including CRAYFISH)

The comments in the previous section apply equally to this group. We have virtually no sightings for this quarter: to be exact, only one! SFW and HI report that on the 11 March they visited the Grand Union Canal at Lubenham, near Market Harborough. Here, they spoke to six anglers who had very little to show for their efforts:

**Perch *Perca fluviatilis*:** SFW and HI report that an angler fishing the Grand Union Canal at Lubenham had caught one small Perch. This was the only fish caught by six anglers - who were complaining to HI and SFW about the lack of fish.

There can be many reasons why anglers fail to catch fish, one reason, quite obviously, is that there may be no fish present, as a result of either predation or pollution. However, this is a comparatively rare situation: more usually there

are fish present, but unwilling to feed for any one of many possible reasons. Fish, like many other coldblooded creatures, are able to survive for quite long periods without feeding. They may cease to feed as a result of dramatic changes in water temperature, changes in the acidity or alkalinity of the water, or even, surprisingly enough, a dramatic fall in barometric pressure. It is also well established that most species will not feed while they are preoccupied with spawning. Some species are happy to feed in bright, sunny conditions, but many others are photophobic and prefer to feed nocturnally, when avian predators are no longer active. Another factor is that at times fish will become preoccupied with a natural food form and ignore anything else: a good example of this phenomenon is when a fall of flying ants occurs over the water, or when the Greendrake Mayfly *Ephemera danica* hatches out on the surface of the water in enormous numbers.

There is, of course, one other factor. As Shakespeare might have put it: "The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in the fish, but in ourselves; in that we are not very good anglers...."

"Intelligence" is a slippery concept; one which is not easily defined. However, it is generally accepted that our freshwater fish species do not possess intelligence as it is commonly defined or understood. Indeed, it could be argued that, given their finely tuned senses, if fish possessed any degree of intelligence then they would be uncatchable.

Nevertheless, there is some anecdotal evidence that some species do possess some faculty of memory, and that having been caught once or twice will learn to avoid certain types of bait. Anglers refer to such fish as being "educated". To sum up, fish behaviour can be more complicated than many people realise.

Finally, it only remains for me to thank our contributors for submitting their sightings.

It is to be hoped that now that the warm weather has finally arrived, people will venture out of doors more... and report their sightings, of course!

**Tony Onions**

## DRAGONFLIES and DAMSELFLIES

### Dragonflies and Damselflies in 2017

Records for dragonflies and damselflies in 2017 were very low both volume and quantity. There follows a brief report on species found during the year. Here's hoping that 2018 produces a better result.

**Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa*:** small numbers were seen at five widespread sites between 17 July and 2 September, including a mating pair at the Loddington Estate on 23 August.



Banded Demoiselle © Jim Graham

**Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*:** the first of the year was a male noted in a rather unusual location, Leicester Cathedral gardens on 24 May during a Peregrine Watch meeting – the Grand Union Canal is reasonably close by. Subsequently it was recorded at 17 other sites and in every month until the final record being ten at King's Mills near Castle Donington on 22 August, also the highest count. Confirmed breeding or pairs were seen at 11 sites.

**White-legged Damselfly *Platycnemis pennipes*:** strangely, no records were received for this species despite recent increases due to improved water quality. There has been increasing concerns that this elegant species is disappearing from some parts of the UK, with reports of population collapse along a number of river systems. Please try and report any that you may see.

**Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella*:** the first and last records came from PHG's Quorn garden on 18 May and 18 July respectively. Small numbers were found at eight further locations

and by far the highest count was a minimum of 200 along a stretch of the Grantham Canal between Stathern Bridge and Plungar on 25 May.

**Variable Damselfly *Coenagrion pulchellum*:** as is usual, the only records of this species came from the Grantham Canal but on only two dates, 25 May and 16 July, and in smaller numbers than is normally expected – both being single-figure counts.

**Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*:** noted at 13 widespread sites between 27 May and 23 August. Once again numbers were low with no count in excess of three. Consequently breeding was only identified at Gypsy Lane Claypit with a mating pair there on 1 June.

**Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma najas*:** there were just two records, six at Bradgate Park on 17 June and "a few" at Groby Fishing Lakes on 3 July.

**Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum*:** no records were received for another expanding species. Possibly being overlooked?

**Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*:** another species where large numbers would be expected but no count was more than four and seen at only seven sites between 24 June and 23 August.

**Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*:** found in just nine locations between 1 May and 13 July with ten at Shepshed Mill Farm on 18 June the highest count.

**Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea*:** the first of the year was a female flying around EPT's Loughborough garden on 24 June. Singles were found in 12 further locations until 15 October, with a pair by the Quorn Brook on 23 August.

**Brown Hawker *Aeshna grandis*:** singles were noted at just nine sites between 24 June and 2 September. The only confirmation of breeding was one ovipositing at King's Mills, Castle Donington on 22 August.

**Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*:** the first record was of one at Welby on 21 July. There were no others until 6 August when one was at PHG's garden pond with up to three there frequently until 16 October, also the last sighting of the

year. Records came from just nine sites but a surprise find was a female buzzing around inside our microwave on 24 August. It was caught and safely released.

**Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator*:** records came from just five sites but covered three months. The first was one near Springfield Lake, Quorn on 24 June and the last was a single at the Loddington Estate on 23 August.

**Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense*:** the only record of this early appearing species was of 16 (11 males, five females) at a regular site along the Grantham Canal by Stathern Bridge on 25 May.

**Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*:** one or two were located at six sites between 23 May and 9 July.

**Scarce Chaser *Libellula fulva*:** there were no records received of this expanding species that was noted on the River Soar north of Kegworth in 2016. Probably still around just not being looked for.



Four-spotted Chaser © Jim Graham

**Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*:** there were just three records: one on the Grantham Canal by Stathern Bridge on 25 May, a mating pair at Tom Long's Meadow in Quorn on 1 June and eight in Bradgate Park on the 17th.

**Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*:** there were just two records, both in July. One was at Woodthorpe Top Pond on the 1st and two at Bradgate Park on the 13th.

**Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*:** reported from five sites; the first was two at Cropston Reservoir on 9 July and the final being six at Cossington Meadows on 30 September.

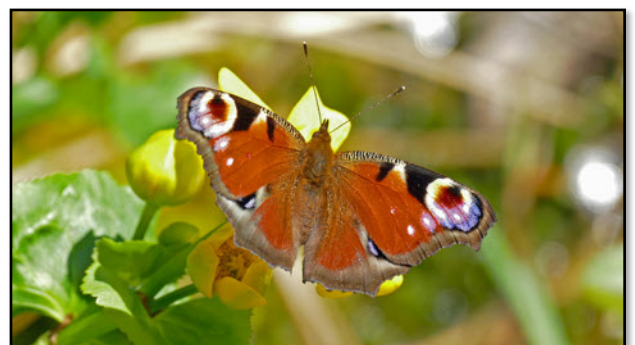
**Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*:** probably the most widely recorded species in 2017 with records from 19 sites. The first, and only record for June, was a female at Tom Long's Meadow on the 28th. Most were of one or two but five were at Cossington Meadows on 30 September. The last record of the year was of two at Gaddesby Brook on 9 November. Pairs or breeding was noted at just three of the 19 sites.

Jim Graham

## BUTTERFLIES

The prolonged cold weather was doubtless responsible for the late appearance of butterflies this quarter and it was 21 March before the first sighting was reported, a **Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*** nectaring on flowering heather in HS's Chaveney Road garden in Quorn. On 25 March the **Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni***, often our first butterfly to appear, was noted in three separate gardens in Quorn, with both sexes present in PJD's Barrow Road garden and males in Warwick Avenue and Chaveney Road gardens and another sighting in JG's Nursery Lane garden at Holwell.

Also on the 25th, two Small Tortoiseshell were present in HS's Quorn garden and five were nectaring on heather there the following day. The only other sightings of the Small Tortoiseshell was of one in a garden on the Cotes Road at Barrow upon Soar and another in our Meeting Street garden in Quorn on 26th.



Peacock © Jim Graham

The only **Peacock *Inachis io*** reported was in PJD's Quorn garden on the 26th.

A **Comma *Polyommatus c-album*** was noted in our Meeting Street garden on the 25th and another found sunning itself in ATO's Shelthorpe garden on the 26th.

Peter Gamble

## MOTHS

As no one sent in any moth records for this quarter, I'm afraid you will have to put up with mine. So, the total number of moths from just six site visits were 473 individuals, a huge increase on this quarter for last year (159 for 2017) but amazingly the number of species remains the same at 18, and again all to MV light.

Starting off with *Ypsolopha ustella* put in an appearance in all three months with the first record in January plus *Agonopterix heracliata* in February and March. Not seen last year but widespread with records from all sites was *Tortricodes alternella*, including 57 from Stoneywell Wood on 14 March and 50 from Charnwood Lodge on 28 January. It is impossible to determine *Acleris ferrugana* from *A. notana* by external characters but several individuals were dissected to confirm which species we are getting: all were *A. ferrugana* and all from Charnwood Forest. Always a lovely moth to see is **Yellow Horned** *Achlya flavicornis* although it seems to have a short flight period - you could quite easily miss it for the year, recorded from Stoneywell Wood and Charnwood Lodge only, both in mid-March. The first **Red-Green Carpet** *Chloroclysta siterata*, a singleton, showed on 19 February and the first **Brindled Pug** *Eupithecia abbreviata* on 14 March.



Yellow Horned © Graham Finch

Towards the end of February the **March Moth** *Aesophila aescularia* started to appear being well into double-figures throughout March. **Pale Brindled Beauty** *Phigalia pilosaria* started in late January and continued throughout the quarter with 30 individuals in late January, with **Oak Beauty** *Biston strataria*



Pale Brindled Beauty © Graham Finch

in decent numbers through the latter half of the quarter. All the above records are from the various sites on the Charnwood Forest. A single first **Spring Usher** *Agriopsis leucophaearia* was from Oakthorpe Picnic area followed by 21 individuals from Charnwood Lodge both late January. The "Forest" produced all the records for **Dotted Border** *Agriopsis marginaria* and although a considerable amount of time was spent searching for wingless/reduced-winged females of some of the early species, none were found.

The most abundant and widespread species goes to **Chestnut** *Conistra vaccinii* found at every site visited, with the **Satellite** *Eupsilia transversa* coming a close second. An early and solitary **Clouded Drab** *Orthosia incerta* was at Stoneywell in mid-March. The earliest **Common Quaker** *Orthosia cerasi* was a single at Oakthorpe Picnic site on 23 January and then 56 at Stoneywell Wood on 14 March. The only sighting of **Hebrew Character** *Orthosia gothica* was three at Stoneywell Wood in mid-March and, finally, five **Twin-spotted Quaker** *Anortha munda* were the only records on the same night at Stoneywell.

A new site for us to try was Grange Wood, which is just outside the modern county boundary in the north-west near Moira, but inside the original Vice County 55 boundary. This wood is looking promising as, although a single cold night was spent here in March, a follow up in April produced a few interesting records but you will have to wait for the next quarter to read about these!

Graham and Anona Finch

## BEETLES

A total of 269 individuals of 45 species, quite a considerable drop numbers all round, I guess this highlights the poor weather conditions we had early in the year, also only three other records were sent in by two people. Totals of 12 species of Carabid, 13 species of Staphylinid plus just four Coccinellid (ladybird) species make up the main body of records.

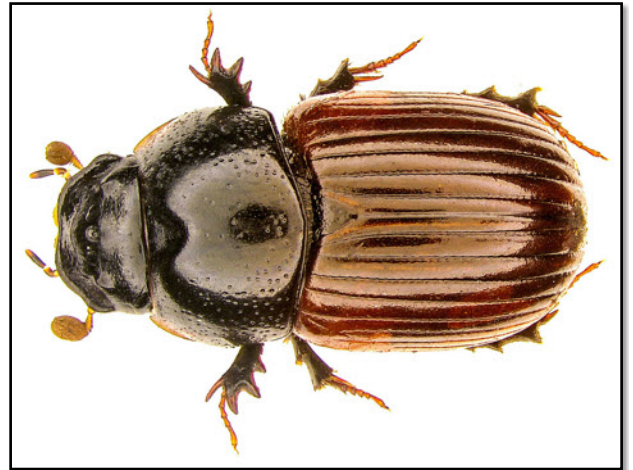
A single *Notiophilus biguttatus* was at Warren Hills and a single *Clivina fossor* was under a block of wood at Shackerstone both at the end of March. Sieving grass tussocks at Leire Cutting held *Bembidion guttula* and *B. lampros*. Sieving a manure heap at Warren Hills produced the only *Bembidion lunulatum*, while *B. obtusum* was found at Newton Burgoland and Warren Hills. All the Warren Hills records are from sieving a large manure heap including a single *Pterostichus vernalis*. Rutland Water and Leire Cutting produced the only *Agonum fuliginosum* and Grange Wood the only *Platynus assimilis* with over 50 of the latter under stones and various pieces of dead wood on the ground. Samples from the Rutland Water Rothamsted Trap held two of the infrequently-recorded *Ophonus schaubergerianus* and Leire Cutting two *Acupalpus dubius* and a single *Paradromius linearis*. A single *Hydrobius fuscipes* was netted from floodwater on Loughborough Big Meadows early January. Back to Warren Hills for the small but quite striking black and red *Atholus bimaculatus*.

Starting the Staphilinids with *Omalium rivulare* from the Rutland Water Rothamsted trap, *Tachyporus obtusus*, *Tachynus rufipes* and *Anotylus rugosus* were well recorded and the only Stenus species was *Stenus clavicornis* from Warren Hills. The latter site and Leire Cutting were the most productive sites, with *Rugilus*



*Anotylus rugosus* © Graham Finch

*rufipes* from Leire, *Lathrobium elongatum* at Loughborough Big Meadow, *Lathrobium longulum* at Leire and Warren Hills. A single *Philonthus cognatus* was sieved from leaf litter in Grange Wood, and the following run of records are all from Warren Hills, *Philonthus politus*, *P. rectangulus*, *P. spinipes*, *Gyrohypnus fracticornis* and *Aphodius fimetarius*.



*Aphodius fimetarius* © Graham Finch

Not surprisingly *Aphodius prodromus* and *A. sphacelatus* were widespread, but a single *Aphodius obliterated* was in the RW Rothamsted samples. Like a small colourful jewel, *Cytilus sericeus* was in the manure heap at Warren Hills and an early *Rhagonycha fulva* from the RW Rothamsted trap. A solitary Kidney-spot Ladybird *Chilocorus renipustulatus* was beaten from Ivy at Leire Cutting, a single Pine Ladybird *Exochomus quadripustulatus* from Hallaton, 22-spot Ladybird *Psyllobora vigintiduopunctata* from Leire Cutting, 7-spot Ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata* from Hallaton, Leire and Melton and finally for the ladybirds 16-spot Ladybird *Tytthaspis sedecimpunctata* from the Rothamsted trap. All the ladybirds were recorded as singletons only.

Apart from a single *Omanadus floralis* from Warren Hills all of the following records are from the RW Rothamsted trap, one *Lagria hirta*, one *Omanadus floralis*, 57 *Psylliodes chrysocephala*, one *Sitona linaetus*, and two *Dorytomus dejeani*.

Graham Finch

## OTHER INSECTS

This is going to be a very short report. I was mostly incapacitated, trying to keep warm, in what was a bitterly cold quarter. Recording any flying invertebrates proved very difficult indeed and we have no records of Hemiptera.

### Diptera

The only hoverfly record received was of a single *Eristalis tenax* from Seaton on 14 March.

The only other records for this group were for the **Holly Leaf-miner** *Phytomyza illicis* from Rothley, Tixover, Birstall and Kirby Muxloe in late March.

### Hymenoptera

**Buff-tailed Bumblebee** *Bombus terrestris*, a few queens were reported at Spinney Hill Park, one nectaring on winter-flowering Heather on 16 March with three noted at the same site later in the month. Further records came from Kirby Muxloe on 22 March, with three noted at Redmile the following day.

The only report of the **Red-tailed Bumblebee** *Bombus lapidarius* was of a single queen at Quorn visiting Honeysuckle flowers on 21 March. I did not see any, as I type this, I have just recorded a few workers and it is now well into June, this is the sort of season that is turning out to be.

Several **Hive Bees** *Apis mellifera* were also reported from Quorn, again with several visiting winter-flowering Honeysuckle on the same date.

The solitary bee *Anthophora plumipes* is usually widespread in March, but not this year; in my garden none appeared until 6 April which is the latest for many years. The only records received were of single males at Seaton on 14 March and Birstall on the 21st.

Thanks to HI, SFW and PHG for the somewhat slender pickings and hope for better things in future months ahead.

Howard Bradshaw

## FLOWERING PLANTS and FERNS

We shall catch up with the plant report in the next *Heritage*.

## OTHER RECORDS

**Records have also been received for:**

Ants, scale insects, psyllids, molluscs, woodlice, mites, mosses, lichens, liverworts, fungi and galls. The gall report will appear once a year.

## WEATHER

**January** gave us great contrasts in the weather. In the end the month ended up milder than usual thanks to an exceptionally mild final week. Afternoon temperatures were logged at 7.7°C which is about 0.5°C above normal, while night time temperatures at Mountsorrel were logged at 2.5°C, just 1°C above the normal figure. January only recorded four night frosts – far fewer than last year. The overall mean of 5.1°C made the month 0.6°C above the long term average. Rainfall totalled 64 mm which was very close to the expected January total and this rain fell on 19 days in the month but sunshine totals of 70 hours were 10% higher than average.

Low pressure dominated the month's weather with no substantial areas of high pressure, so January was often rather and damp but some exceptionally sunny days on occasion helped to boost the sunshine totals. The month began with storm Eleanor racing across the north of the British Isles but impacts locally were limited with peak gusts just 40 mph which is fairly standard fare for January. It then turned cooler for a few days with our coldest night registered on the 8th at -2.7°C. Snow fell on four days in the month but settled only on the 21st when the low ground received 2 cm but up to 5 cm fell up in the Forest. The 18th brought us some very strong winds and I broke my weather station record which has stood for 20 years when I recorded a gust of 62 mph, a storm force gust. Strangely enough the low pressure that brought these winds was not named by the MET Office even though they were the strongest we have had for several years. The naming of storms is a very controversial idea as some weather departments, such as the Irish Weather service, will name them but the British service does not. It all depends on the perceived damage a storm will do in that particular country but it creates a great deal of confusion! The last

ten days of the month saw the weather become much milder as winds turned southerly. On three days in the final week the temperature exceeded 13°C, more than double the expected figure and on the 28th the temperature peaked at 14°C with more than seven hours of sunshine and it felt like spring! So ended another January and so far the winter has been cooler than the previous four winters but we still have not had a really severe spell.

It will be no surprise to learn that **February 2018** was the coldest February month since 1996. Afternoon temperatures were logged at 5.7°C nearly 2°C below normal with night time temperatures at 0°C which was 1.5°C below normal. Frost was recorded on 14 nights which was the highest total since Feb 2012. The overall mean of 2.8°C was 1.7°C below the long term average of 4.5°C for this month. It was a dry month however as high pressure frequently stopped the Atlantic rain bearing fronts from crossing us. In Mountsorrel I recorded just 33.4 mm which was 25% less than usual. It was a sunny month however with 98 hours being recorded which was 25% above normal, helped by clear skies with the high pressure areas giving us some large individual totals. The month was dominated by high pressure but a small but energetic area of low pressure on the 10th gave wind gusts up to 50 mph.

The month began on a cool note with snow showers recorded on three days in the first week. The second week turned unsettled and quite wet with most of the month's rain falling and gale force winds on the 10th. The third week saw it turn briefly milder with our mildest day of the month recording a double digit maximum of 10.3°C on the 19th with that night seeing our mildest night at 6.3°C. On the 22nd the weather began to change as a large area of high pressure developed over Scandinavia and very cold easterly winds began to blow in from Western Russia. There was frost every night from the 22nd onwards and the days grew colder and colder. On the 26th the bitter air arrived and then we had four days of temperatures below freezing both by day and by night. The coldest day the 28th saw temperatures peak at -2°C which was the coldest day since Feb 1991 and at night temperatures dropped to -6.7°C our coldest night since February 2012. Fine snow fell



*Muddy February Boots© Steve Woodward*

throughout much of this four day period and the strong gusty winds made it feel like -15°C. This truly was staggeringly cold and nothing has been like it since Feb 1991 when we had a similar Siberian freeze. Snow fell frequently during this period and it blew into drifts in the sub-zero temperatures but we avoided the huge snowfall totals some places received with average depths of lying snow being from 3- 10 cm on the hills. Many schools were closed during this period and local gritting crews did a fantastic job keeping the roads open in blizzard like conditions. As the month closed the cold grew stronger and the first day of March brought us the coldest day ever recorded! Winter as a whole brought us 10% more rain than normal but there was also 15% more sunshine than in an average winter. Temperatures were logged 4.2°C which was 0.5°C below normal making it our coldest winter since 2013.

**March 2018** was the coldest March for five years but it also ranked second coldest to March 2013 in my records going back nearly 30 years. Afternoon temperatures were logged at 8°C - a considerable 2°C below normal, while night time temperatures of 1.8°C were 1.5°C below normal. The average temperature of 4.9°C was a significant 1.7°C below normal. It was also an extremely wet month with 98.4 mm of rain falling at Mountsorrel which is twice the usual figure and this made it the wettest March in Leicestershire since 1947. With all the rain you will not be surprised that it was a dull month with only 65 hours of sunshine recorded - only about half the expected figure!

The month began with a Siberian blast that had established itself in late February. March 1st proved to be the coldest March day ever

recorded with a max of just -2°C a staggering 12°C below normal. With the biting winds that gusted up to 33 mph, the month's highest gust, came some snow which continued to blow about in the arctic landscape. Many local events were cancelled in weather conditions that were some of the harshest seen since February 1991. The month's lowest night temperature of -5.3°C was also recorded on the 1st. By the 4th the bitter air was replaced by less cold conditions but this then led to an exceptionally wet second week with nearly 50 mm of rain falling. Milder Atlantic-based air took over for a short time and on the 10th temperatures reached 13°C and everyone thought spring had arrived. However, after waiting five years for an easterly airflow, we then had a repeat between the 17th and 19th as high pressure over NE Europe brought back the freezing air. The 17th and 18th saw more snow falling locally than the first occasion with 5 cm being recorded at my station with more than double that on the high ground. Again temperatures by day stayed below freezing a very rare occurrence in a winter month let alone March when the day temperature should reach 11°C. The bitter air stayed around for a few days but milder SW winds gradually replaced it. The Easter weekend however saw a return to cold and wet conditions with over 40 mm of rain falling over the holiday period and only an hour's sunshine was logged across the long weekend making it the dullest and wettest for many years. Severe flooding took place once again in the Soar Valley with the usual roads closed as the floodwaters rose. So March for an excited weather recorder like me was an absolute classic containing all types of weather except sunshine and warmth! Let's hope April can change things and that we get some long overdue warmth.

**Phil Morrish**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Heritage* has been compiled from records submitted by the following members and friends:

H Bradshaw, B Croxtall, R D Dandy, P J Darby, M A Finch, G L Finch, P H Gamble, J Graham, S C Graham, D Gray, J Green, M Hall, H Ikin, A T Onions, D A Perry, H Shacklock, S F Woodward.

We are grateful to them all.

Records for the second quarter of 2018 should be sent as soon as possible to:

Helen Ikin, 237 Forest Road, Woodhouse, Loughborough, Leics. LE12 8TZ.

email: [helen.canids@btinternet.com](mailto:helen.canids@btinternet.com)