

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 15-Jan-15 11:15 PM GMT

26th December 2014 to 14th January 2015.

Despite a few warm days, and the fact that others have seen a few moths, we are yet to encounter such a welcome sight. Looking at the long term weather forecast it seems we must wait a while. In the meantime we have undertaken some birdwatching, but with not much changing here in Kent our opportunities are limited.

The long staying Great Grey Shrike at Chilham is still present and has shown well on the few occasions that we have been back. The 2 Cattle Egrets remain in their chosen field at Lydd with a herd of cattle. The Bewick Swan flock on Walland Marsh remains and has increased to 90 plus birds, together with one adult Whooper Swan. They are sometimes joined by up to 4 Bean Geese.

A tour around the Dungeness peninsular, including Walland and Scotney, will normally allow up to 6 Great White Egrets, 2 Cattle Egrets and 5 Little Egrets to be seen. At least 8 Bitterns are present but take a bit of luck to see, late afternoons on the ARC pit appear best. Smew, Goldeneye and Goosander can all be seen on the RSPB reserve. Nearby Scotney should allow 1 Scaup and 3 Black Necked Grebes. 2 Ravens are regular, as are Peregrine and Marsh Harrier.

There has been 2 bits of excitement in this period. The first was when a Lesser Yellowlegs was found on Pett Level. It can be elusive, but sometimes shows from the road down to 25 metres. This bird has proved very popular allowing many to catch up with this particular species. The 2nd bit of news would have been even more exciting had it stayed but the Little Bustard, which was only seen for a few minutes and photographed, has never been refound. This is despite a small band of us searching for a few days across all the likely habitat between Lydd and Rye. Had we refound it it's likely that the bird would have attracted a large crowd as many in the South East still need this species for Britain.

Yesterday, the 14th, ended this period with a sighting of a 1st winter Night Heron on a private pit at Hythe. The bird can be seen at times from a public footpath, from which we enjoyed reasonable views, but it also disappears at times. Night Herons in Britain are more associated with Spring and early Summer but winter records are also known. Its been present for at least a month with the fisherman reporting it as a Bittern. Luckily a local birder checked it out and immediately found the Night Heron. Hopefully it will stay a while and become more viewable.

We did manage to see the Comet Lovejoy using our binoculars but to be honest found it a little disappointing. Even with bins it was just a haze and not the very bright thing we was hoping for. I suppose being that far away means that it was good as it gets.

Following a horrible night of rain and strong winds all we can say is role on Spring.



The Lesser Yellowlegs at Pett Level pools. Sorry about the photo but taken through a fence to avoid flushing the feeding bird.



The 2 Cattle Egrets remain near Lydd (Kent).



The Great Grey Shrike remains at Chilham.



This large flock (100) of Barnacle Geese is present on Scotney pits. Although annual in winter we presume are of feral origin.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 06-Feb-15 12:01 AM GMT

14th January 2015 to 05th February 2015.

Not one winter moth or butterfly, despite a few searches. Can't blame them mind you as the night time temperatures have made me hide under the covers. So that only leaves birds and they have been thin on the ground around here. Despite my optimism on the last blog update the Juvenile Night Heron only stayed another week, possibly moved by the cold weather. Another, or the same, Night Heron was reported near Steyning (East Sussex) for a day. Despite searching I don't think that it has been re-found there.

The Lesser Yellowlegs has moved from Pett Pools to the Winchelsea end of Rye Harbour. This makes it much harder and distant to see. The Great Grey Shrike at Chilham continues to welcome all visitors although it has taken to wandering more lately but always returns to the same bush eventually. Dungeness has been very quiet lately with no real influx of winter migrants. 2 Bean Geese and a few Whitefronted Geese have taken up residence on Scotney gravel pits.

One of the Dungeness highlights has been the finding of a flock of Tree Sparrows numbering well over 40. This is in addition to the regular flock of 12 on Walland Marsh. Tree Sparrow numbers are in serious decline and any additional flocks are most welcome. The number of Bewick Swans on Walland Marsh has reached 85, which is well down on most years. It does however contain 9 juveniles and one yellow coloured neck band individual, numbered 053E. I am sure its history will follow shortly.

This lack of birds does at least mean we look forward to spring with even more eagerness. It can't be long before the first moth stirs and shows itself to us.

PS. I look out of the window to see sleet and snow falling. Perhaps my optimism is misplaced.



The only male Smew currently wintering at Dungeness. A stunning bird.



The only male Smew currently wintering at Dungeness. A stunning bird.



Another photo of one of the wintering Cattle Egrets at Lydd. Still a pleasure to watch.



This Bittern was hiding in the reeds at Dungeness. We could see him, just.



The Juvenile Night Heron near Hythe. Well hidden in the bushes but still a welcome sight.



Two of the distant flock of 85 Bewick Swans.



The coloured neck and legged ringed Bewick Swan on Walland Marsh.

Re: Dave Brown

by trevor, 06-Feb-15 03:20 AM GMT

Hi Dave,

No more sightings have been reported of the Snowy Owl i'm afraid, but the chap with the horses has been keeping his eyes open. He told me that he had a good long view of the bird, as the area where it was seen is a flat wide open space .

All the best,
TREVOR.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 13-Feb-15 07:53 PM GMT

Thanks Trevor.

6th February 2015 to 12th February 2015.

Not a lot happening really although we have seen our first moths of the season, thanks to our friends at Ruckinge. Only Early Moth, Dark Chestnut, March Moth and a Pale Brindled Beauty, but none the less a pleasant start to the year. This was on the 10th. Another Cattle Egret has turned up. This time at Hamstreet along the Military Canal near the Garden Centre. Bit of a surprise this one but arrived as the Little Egret numbers increased to 5. I doubt whether it is fresh into the country, but with the Great White Egret numbers at Dungeness suddenly increasing to 12 recently you never know. The 2 Cattle Egrets remain in the Lydd area although they have become more mobile recently. This is because the herd of cows have been moved. Incidentally, the Hamstreet bird remains with a flock of sheep and not the more expected cows. The Great Grey Shrike remains faithful to it's Chilham site. The numbers of Bitterns being seen at Dungeness seems to have fallen off lately. Just in time for the guided annual walks this weekend around Dungeness RSPB for members and public alike. We have been seeing 5 or 6 birds regularly but just lately this has fallen to one or two and some days none at all. All's not lost though as the roosting number of Egrets on the Reserve has increased at the same time. It is now possible to see up to 12 Great White, 2 Cattle and 15 Little Egrets all come in from 16.30 hours onwards. An exceptional number and unheard of only 5 years ago.

The number of Raven sightings in Kent slowly increases. In addition to the 2 at Dungeness and 2 near Dover a new bird is being reported near Seasalter and another at Cliffe. Not so long ago this was a mega bird in Kent. It's increase coincides with the increase in Peregrine numbers.

The oddest event of this period was the Eagle Owl photographed near Dover, but not seen again (yet). Most likely an escape, but with the nearest birds on the continent now breeding on the Belgium coast you never can tell. They do not like to cross water but we said that about Short Toed Eagle and look what happened last year.

Not long to go before the Butterfly season commences, although I am sure that we have not seen the last of the cold weather.



Early Moth. An appropriate name for our first moth of the season.



A newly arrived Cattle Egret. This time at Hamstreet.

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 13-Feb-15 08:57 PM GMT

Hi! Dave, you've just solved a picture puzzle for me. I took a photo of a bird in a tree whilst I was at Penn Flash, the shot was very blurred and I could make out the shape but that's all. when I saw your photo of the the night Heron, I'm convinced it was the bird I saw. So thanks for solving my puzzle 😊 I like your shots, I saw a Bittern only once that was at Mere Sands near Southport that was a real experience ,I hope to visit Dungeness when I come to Kent this Summer Goldie 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 20-Feb-15 11:58 PM GMT

Hello Goldie, very glad to help. The Night Heron in Britain is quite a scarce bird but very easily overlooked because of their camouflaged plumage. The low number reported is probably not helped by many some books only showing the bird in Adult Summer plumage, which is a lot brighter and more obvious to see. Pennington Flash is a typical habitat for them with lots of water to feed and bushes to hide in.

Our Butterfly season is up and running 😊 On Sunday the 15th February we saw both Red Admiral and Peacock in reasonably sunny conditions at Ashdown Forest. The long wait is over, the spirits are lifted, summer is on its way.

Back to winter birding. The reason we were at Ashdown was to try and see the very elusive Little Bunting that is hanging around the Forest Lodge area. We heard of some people visiting the site five or six times before connecting with the bird so our hopes were not too high. In the event we did manage about 2 minutes worth in a 2.5 hour wait. No time for photography just a quick look, admire, and it was gone, not to be seen again all day. Luckily we have seen several in Britain so today was just about enjoying the winter sunshine, and the view. We never tire of Ashdown Forest, especially when 2 Woodlarks were seen and 2 Ravens flew over calling.

Tuesday 17th February saw our 2nd attempt for the wintering Richards Pipit at Shellness (Isle of Sheppy). This time we were luckily with several views of the bird on the ground and in flight. Also seen, female Hen Harrier, Merlin, 4 White Fronted Geese. Nearby Capel Fleet produced 16 Pink Footed Geese, Peregrine and 11 Marsh Harriers.

Wednesday 18th February was another fine sunny day producing lots of mums trying to keep hoards of school kids amused for the day visiting all the same sites we had selected. First was Pett Level where a raft of 33 Velvet Scoters was reasonably close to the shore, with a flock 30 White Fronted Geese and 3 Ruff on the actual levels. Camber Sands was too crowded so next was Scotney Pits. 14 White Fronted Geese landed in front of us and one of the Black Necked Grebes showed well. We ended the day crossing Walland Marsh to see the Whooper Swan and 83 Bewick Swans.

Not a bad few days, made better by our butterfly sightings.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 15-Mar-15 11:49 PM GMT

A GOOD START TO THE SEASON.

So far this year we have caught up with Red Admiral, Peacock, Brimstone and now Comma. We can't complain with that as its still not mid March but will have to wait until the next mild spell to move our sightings forward.

On the Plant front things are also moving along nicely with sightings of Primrose, Snowdrop and Lesser Celandine in the sunny spots.

Whilst waiting for Summer to arrive we have carried on our birding activities in a mix of all types of weather and wind strengths. The main talking point in this area has been the lack of bird numbers and variety. It seems some species have just failed to arrive. No Waxwings this year, very few Brambling, Siskin or Redpolls. No influx of Crossbills. Redwings and Fieldfares are in much smaller numbers, as are winter ducks such as Smew, Goosanders and Scaup. We used to get 200 plus Scaup winter on Scotney about 20 years ago. This year one. Finally, Bittern numbers are down from last year.

On the plus side the 2 Cattle Egrets remain near Lydd, Great White Egrets are still present in reasonable numbers and the number of Little Egrets roosting at Dungeness often numbers in excess of 20. The Great Grey Shrike remains for all comers at Branch Road, Chilham.

A very early and unusual winter record was of a Wood Sandpiper photographed at Elmley on the 20th February. The following day found us visiting the site to see the bird ourselves but it had departed early that morning. Still it was nice to see a female Merlin and Peregrine amongst the 7 Marsh Harriers. Next stop was Capel Fleet. Not the Raptor hot spot it once was but we still managed one Short Eared Owl, a female Hen Harrier and 11 Marsh Harriers. Careful scanning of the Goose flock found a minimum of 50 Whitefronted Geese and 30 Pink Footed Geese.

The 22nd February found us at Dungeness looking at a fine male Red Crested Pochard, the male Smew, 2 Cattle Egrets and 2 Goldeneye. Scotney produced just one Scaup and a Little Stint.

A quick visit to Dover Harbour on the 23 February found us looking at a Juvenile Glaucous Gull. Unfortunately too far for photos. Still, a monster of a bird that definitely ruled the feeding table when people fed scraps to the gulls.

The 24th –26th February remained quiet although a Raven at Dungeness and another at Pett Level added interest. A Bittern flying along the RSPB entrance track at Dungeness was one of our few sightings of this species so far this year. A Short Eared Owl at Seasalter on the 27th was really nice to see.

On one of our many visits to Dungeness the 1st March produced a Badger out feeding in broad daylight.

The 7th March found us at Sandwich Bay looking at 4 Goosanders, a lone Pink Footed Goose and a Black Redstart.

Tuesday the 10th March was a good day at Dungeness with 2 Small Tortoiseshells flying around in the sun, 3 Firecrests in the Lighthouse Garden, 5 Chiffchaffs in the Gully and 3 Egyptian Geese on Scotney.

On the 12th, whilst looking for any spring passage Red Kites, which we failed to see, we found a field near Oare containing 28 adult Mediterranean Gulls looking really smart in their summer plumage of all Black Heads and pure white bodies and wings.

Finally, Friday the 13th yielded our first Wheatear of the year with a fine male at Dungeness, along with 3 Black Redstarts and a stunning male Stonechat most likely of the race rubicola.

Not a bad period of wildlife watching considering the weather, but hopefully just a taster of all the goodies yet to arrive.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 16-Apr-15 11:04 PM GMT

14 March 2015 to 14th April 2015.

Its been a month since I updated our diary. Does this mean we have not been doing much wildlife watching? I am pleased to say we have been out and about as much as ever, including enjoying a few good butterfly days. Our year list gradually creeps up with Brimstone, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Speckled Wood, Large White, Small White and Orange Tip. Notice it does not include Scarce Tortoiseshell (Purlborough). We were tempted, but resisted, in the hope that it would become more reliable. It only showed for about 2-3 Hours on each of the 2 days that it showed. It did not show on the day between the 2 viewable dates, but when it did show it was very obliging by all accounts.

Firstly news about the long stayers. The Chilham (Kent) Great Grey Shrike seems to have departed, with our last sighting on the 27th March. I understand that there was a sighting on the 28th March, but no reported sightings since. We have checked 3 times since then but have failed to see it, so assume that it has commenced its return journey. The 2 Cattle Egrets at Lydd still remain although have become a lot more elusive of late. The Great White Egrets at Dungeness have reduced in numbers significantly, with now only 2-3 present from the maximum Winter count of 12. As usual Little Egrets are everywhere. We even get them over our garden. No one seems to take much notice of them these days as there are hundreds now in the country. Only 30 years ago they were a twitcher's dream. Pity, as they are a delightful bird with a feeding action that entertains.

A feature in Kent of the period in question is the annual passage of Red Kites. Of the dozens that pass through very few, if any, are wing tagged. It is believed that some are returning Scottish birds but I don't think anyone is sure. Anyway, of the 30 or so seen so far this year we have only managed one. Not a good return for our many hours sky watching. Fellow member Marc Heath has seen 10 over his garden on the North Kent coast. The most reported together that I know of is 6 near Folkestone. A most majestic bird and one we look forward to each year. One day they will expand their territory and become a regular Kent bird. They have done that in West Sussex, so hopefully East Sussex and Kent is next.

Finally onto the returning migrants. We have seen many Swallows, but only one each of Sand Martin and House Martin. Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps have returned in good numbers. Also seen, Garganey, Willow Warblers, Firecrests, Black Redstarts, Wheatears, Yellow Wagtails, Little Ringed Plovers, Greenshanks, Whimbrel and Common Tern. Summer really has arrived.

Whilst searching for migrant birds and resident butterflies we have noticed what we believe is an explosion in Cetti's Warbler numbers. Another bird that has increased in numbers over the years, apart from the odd blip because of a cold winter. Whilst walking around Stodmarsh the other day we heard a minimum of 30 calling birds. Dungeness has at least 12 calling on the ARC pit alone. We have even encountered birds around the Warehorne / Appledore area. In the Eighties the sum population for Kent was below 10. For all it's loud explosive call it remains a most difficult bird to get a good, out in the open, view. One of Britain's skulkers.

With reports of Green Hairstreak and Duke of Burgundy emerging the next month will be most exciting. Hopefully a Scarce Tortoiseshell will also make itself available to all-comers.

Dave

Some photos to follow when time allows.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 28-Apr-15 10:57 PM GMT

15th April 2015 to 25th April 2015.

We have suffered here with some really cold days and even colder nights. Moth trapping for most in East Kent has been non existent. The only moths we have seen have been real goodies. Both on the 25th. Firstly, a Northern Drab was caught at DBO and available to visitors. This is normally a moth of Northern England and Scotland but a few have been seen and caught on the Dungeness Peninsular over the last few years. Only the second we have seen ourselves. The second moth was actually 2 male Emperors at Oare Marshes. A fresh female was seen in a bramble bush and despite the rather windy conditions we watched as 2 males homed in over a considerable distance (250 metres plus). It was absolutely fascinating to watch how they followed her scent trail in, moving from side to side, up and down, until they located her. Having made the effort to get to her one male showed little interest in mating, but the other male was active within minutes. We no other males appearing we left them alone to enjoy themselves. A wonderful

moment.

On the Butterfly front we have added Green Hairstreak, with 5 at Wye NNR, and Small Copper, with 10 at Dungeness. Green Veined White and Holly Blue has also made the list. Brimstone and Orange Tip numbers this year are encouraging so far. We have looked for, but not seen so far, Dingy Skipper. The visit to Wye NNR also produced a few Early Purple Orchids.

Finally, on the bird front we have lucky with a really good view of a Hoopoe at Hythe on the 18th April. Followed later that day by a Ring Ouzel near Dungeness Observatory. Summer migrants such as Hobby, Lesser Whitethroat, Sandwich Tern and Cuckoo have all been noted.

With large numbers of Painted Lady's and Striped Hawkmoths reported on the Continent all we need now is the sun, a Southerly or South East wind, and we will all be enjoying this bumper bonanza. Happy butterflying.



This stunningly beautiful female Emperor moth was irresistible to two males. Pity the light was not too good to capture the full beauty.



The male and female Emperor moth. Having located her the pair spent some time together.



Hoopoe near Hythe Ranges.



Small Cooper near Dungeness Observatory.



Peacock Butterfly.



Comma near Ashford Kent.



A small party of Green Sandpipers at Grove Ferry NR.



Early Purple Orchid, Wye NNR.

Re: Dave Brown

by Pauline, 28-Apr-15 11:42 PM GMT

Some great sightings there Dave – love the photos. A few years back a neighbour claimed he'd had a Hoopoe in his garden – didn't realise they looked so exotic!

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 29-Apr-15 01:07 AM GMT

Your photo's are very impressive Dave especially the Hoopoe never seen that bird before although I've heard of itGoldie 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 05-Jun-15 04:35 AM GMT

26th April 2015 to 26 May 2015.

Sorry about the lack of updates recently. The reasons include a two week period without internet connection, or at best a limited intermittent service. BT have provided a replacement Hub which has now got me back online.

I suppose the real disappointment was our Butterfly Transect walks. On the 21st May, in decent weather, we undertook two walks and managed a total of 28 butterflies in 4 hours and 21 of those were Brimstones. This is well down on expectations for this time of the year.

We have seen some good Butterflies during this period including a maximum day count of 5 Duke of Burgundy, Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, Orange Tips, Brimstones, Peacocks, Painted Lady (11th May), a maximum day count of 10 Wall Brown, Common Blues, Small Heaths, Small Coppers, Green Veined, Small, Large Whites and Speckled Woods. We must not complain but it has been very hard work on some days.

Probably more rewarding from a personal point of view was seeing a STRIPED HAWKMOTH on the 18 May at Lydd. This beauty had been trapped overnight by one of the local mothers and was made available to all who wished to see thanks to a kind gesture by the very friendly lady. This moth was on our much wanted list and with the news of large numbers being seen in Spain our eager anticipation was much rewarded. Strangely there was less than 10 other moths in the trap so someone smiled on us all. Our own moth trap has been a bit of a disaster really with very few moths being caught. Our best has been Poplar Hawkmoth (11th May), and White Point (10th May). Other good moths seen have been the Ni Moth and Chamomile Shark (Dungeness 13th May), Least Black Arches and Great Prominent (Hamstreet 22nd May).

Dates for Orchids to come into flower seem to have been delayed for some species. However, we have now got up with Early Purple, Green Winged,

Lady, Fly, Monkey, Man, Greater Butterfly Orchids, White Helleborine and Common Twayblade. I am sure that many were not far off normal flowering dates, it's just that we have been become used to mild winters and early emergence.

Finally the birds. Not really that good apart from two exceptional days. The first, was the 02 May, when we actually went out of the county to twitch the very popular, and very rare, HUDSONIAN GODWIT. This bird had set up temporary home on the flood at Meare Heath. Not much to look at really but made up for by its rare status. Only the second or third for Britain, with the last sighting being over 30 years ago. It associated with a flock of Black Tailed Godwits of the Icelandic race who were presumably all returning north of their spring migration.

The second good bird day was the 16th May. We had been touring East Kent when we came across a Red Kite. For some Red Kite is a every day occurrence and probably don't get a second glance. However, for Kent birders its a good bird. Whats more it has the wow factor as it majestically flies over you. Feeling the the weather was suitable for raptor migration we headed to a high spot just south of Stodmarsh. What a good move. I picked up another Red Kite flying over a wood in a South West direction. Our son, searching for it suddenly said there's four more up there, wrong there's seven. They kept on coming. Over two hours we had a total 32 Red Kites. Even better, a Black Kite was amongst them. Probably our best ever Kent raptor day. Another local birder also saw the birds and we kept in constant touch via the power of Twitter. So twitter does have it's uses with immediate news updates.

Days like that make up for all the quiet days most of us suffer from.

With good butterflies still to emerge that's hope this year is a good one.

PS. Heath Fritillaries are out at East Blean Woods.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 05-Jul-15 01:00 AM GMT

27 May 2015 to 27 June 2015.

The biggest news during this period is the chaos brought to this part of Kent by Operation Stack. What has closing the M20 to stack lorries got to do with butterflies. Well got a lot actually because it means we have to abandon plans to visit good butterfly hotspots because of traffic issues. With the M20 being closed for a number of days over a distance of some 30 miles it brings the rest of the road network around here to a standstill. I have heard tales of journeys that normally take 30 - 40 minutes taking up to 4 hours. People being late for work and children being late for school (although they are probably enjoying the experience even if the mums on the school run are not). The road we live on is badly affected as people use it as a alternative to the official diversion route of the A20. In the last week or so we have abandoned plans to travel for the Large Blues, and nearer to home, the Dark Green Fritillary and Purple Emperor.

Enough of the moaning. The good news is that we are still managing to see wildlife locally even if the journey is extended. The end of May we continued to see Green Hairstreaks, Duke of Burgundy and Wall Browns. Marden Meadows was awash with 1,000's of Green Winged Orchids. What a sight and just a hint of what some parts of the countryside must have looked like before development. The Late Spider Orchid was earlier this year at the WYe NNR but was in lower numbers.

A visit of the 4th June to Samphire Hoe produced 2 Clouded Yellows with a few Early Spider Orchids still in flower.

Visiting East Blean on the 5th June proved a good move for not only was 16 Heath Fritillaries on show but also our first Hummingbird Hawkmoth and Norfolk Hawker of the year. This is the 3rd year running that Norfolk Hawker has breed in Kent, with a decent and easy accessible colony at Westbere available by a public footpath. The maximum count I have heard of here is 25. The next day we visited Kingsdown to see the colony of Small Blues. We managed only 7 but did see 9 Painted Ladies, 7 Silver Y's and Bordered Straw moths following a few warm days of South Easterly airflow. The same day (6th June) also produced a Dusky Hook-tip moth at our good friends at Ruckinge. Thursday saw our first Black Veined moth of the year at Wye NNR but little else was happening until the 13th June when Ruckinge again produced the goods with 2 Small Mottled Willow and Bordered Straw moths.

The 14th June was a real treat for we visited an undisclosed site in Norfolk at the invitation of the RSPB. What a day. At least 40 Fen orchids on show at one of their few remaining British sites. These were supported by many Early Marsh and Southern Marsh Orchids. This visit was topped when we found a Swallowtail butterfly low down in the reeds seeking shelter from the cold winds and falling drizzle. To end the day we visited the public part of the Rex Graham Reserve to see 90 plus Military Orchids on display.

Tuesday the 16 June we saw our first Large Skipper of the year, with our count of Black Veined Moths reaching two. Thursday the 18 June was a moth day with Ruckinge producing Lilac Beauty, Beautiful Hook-tip and Orange moth. The 20th produced our maximum count of 9 Black Veined moths at Wye with 2 Painted Ladys being a bit of a surprise. We also saw our first Marbled White of the year at the same location.

A visit to Sandwich Bay on the 21st June was rewarded with 80 plus Lizard Orchids, 3 Marbled Whites and a good count of 40 Large Skippers. We also managed to track down our first ever Oblique Stripped and Bright Wave moths. These are very rare day flying moths of this particular area of Britain. It was also very nice to see at least 8 Small Tortoiseshells. The 23rd saw us catching up with the returning Adult Bonapartes Gull at Oare Marshes.

The 24th June turned out to be a memorable day for after seeing a Clouded Yellow and 5 Bee Orchids at Monkton NR we visited Pegwell Bay Country Park. It was more a late lunch break than anything but whilst eating our snacks we were amazed when 3 Bee-eaters flew low over us, showing off their brilliant colours and calling all the time. We managed to get 3 other birders onto them before they disappeared low towards Sandwich. As we walked slowly south, to check in case they had landed, we met another couple who said they saw them and knew what they were immediately because of their many European holidays.

Our Butterfly transect on the 26 June in Hamstreet found 9 Ringlets, first of the year, and still 3 Brimstones flying.

The 27th June saw us visiting Ashdown Forest where we saw Silver Studded Blue, Painted Lady, Grass Wave (moth), Golden Ringed Dragonfly, Brilliant Emerald, Small Red Damselfly and Keeled Skimmer amongst the more common species. The day ended with a Red Kite flying over and Woodlark, Tree Pipit and Redstart on show.

Not a bad period of wildlife watching, but as I type this report today Operation Stack has been reinstated after being lifted for 24 hours. Not because of the French strike this time but because of illegal migrants forcing the Channel Tunnel to close. Luckily this time the closure is only for 18 miles so hopefully not so much traffic congestion.

PS. Lots of photos to follow.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 25-Jul-15 05:50 AM GMT

28th JUNE 2015 TO 24TH JULY 2015

Sorry to bore you again, although Operation Stack rarely makes the headlines these days, it has actually been instigated on 19 of the last 30 days. The minimum length of motorway closed is 18 miles, but often 30 miles. Unless you live in this area most will not understand the chaos that brings. People struggle to go about their daily lives in a normal way, including work, school, shopping but probably most important of all, medical appointments. The local roads often end up with gridlock. The worst journey reported so far has been one of 60 miles, normally taking 2 hours, actually taking 7 hours. Why do I mention this again. Well on Wednesday of this week, with 30 miles of Motorway closed, news broke of a Large Tortoiseshell being present near St Margaret's feeding on a buddleia bush. The normal route would take me down the now closed Motorway. The obvious diversionary route of the A20 was already being reported as stationary in places. With such a good butterfly for the UK on offer it was a case of go man go. We took a lot of country

lanes but eventually arrived some one and half hours later, (normally takes 40 minutes so not too bad), to enjoy reasonable views of this Kent rarity. It was on show all of the one hour that we were present, but always at the top of the tall bush. It had blackish legs so ruled out Yellow Legged. It also showed signs of wear but none the less was very enjoyable. The finder and other locals had put news out via the Bird Information services and various Butterfly groups on Twitter so many enjoyed its arrival. I understand that it was not present the next day, Thursday, although the weather was not so good.

Back to the period in question.

30th June 2015. Noted our first 2 White Admirals of the year in Longrope Wood (Hamstreet).

01st July 2015. After a long wait we managed several brief views of a Icterine Warbler at Bishopstone, whilst our Garden moth trap produced a new one in the form of Broad-barred White.

02 July 2015. The 2 White Admirals were still present and Dungeness produced a Bittern.

03 July 2015. A nice warm sunny day produced 9 Silver Washed Fritillary at Bourne Wood, Hamstreet, together with 3 White Admirals and a Purple Hairstreak. Our good friends at Ruckinge had caught Waved Black and Clouded Brindle overnight and were now available for us to enjoy.

04 July 2015. Still warm and sunny so it was off to Warehorne and 3 White Letter Hairstreaks. As usual, they would not come down low enough for photos. Still really pleased that this small colony is still hanging on.

05 July 2015. The highlight of a very windy day was a majestic and very large Crane fly. *Tipula maxima* Crane fly. I understand that this is Britain's largest Crane fly and indeed was impressive.

06 July 2015. The Adult Bonapartes Gull had returned to Oare Marshes for it's 3rd year. Nearby a Red Kite fly over us at Doddington.

08 July 2015. It's not just Hoggers who can find Small Coppers at Dungeness. We found lots, but I will leave the photo's to Hoggers.

10 July 2015. This was a very good day. Some Moffers were trapping in Kent at various authorised sites, so today we joined them to see Suspected (Folkestone) and Marbled Grass Veneer (Hamstreet) amongst a good range of other moths. There is a tale to this event which meant we missed a very rare moth for Britain. We left the main team to go home around midnight. Another moffer was trapping about a mile away but knew we were about. He caught a 5th for Britain called the Latin. He tried to ring us several times but the Hamstreet area is notorious for no, or limited, mobile signal. Therefore he was unable to contact us before we went home. He carried on moffing for a while before he then travelled round and eventually found the main team, who were still moffing at 4am. So about half a dozen people saw this major rarity whilst the rest of us can only dream of seeing one another time.

12 July 2015. Our good friends at Ruckinge had caught a Splendid Brocade. Would we like to see it. You bet we would. We had seen one before during the most recent influx of about 7 years. But, this our second, was just as welcome.

13 July 2015. A few of the moffers from Friday night met up and this time we saw Ruddy Carpet, Red Necked Footman, Purple Clay and Olive Crescent. I didn't realise moffing could be so addictive, enjoyable and exciting. It can also be very tiring staying out until the wee small hours.

14 July 2015. Wiping the sleep out of our hours it was up and away to Dungeness to enjoy Small Mottled Willow (migrant moth), True Lovers Knot (sounds romantic) and another Purple Clay.

15 July 2015. A Red Letter day for the garden moth trap. We caught our first ever garden Kent Black Arches.

17 July 2015. A trip to Oare and a Painted Lady, together with the first returning Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper.

18 July 2015. Thanks to the Dungeness regulars we caught up with a fine adult White Winged Black Tern. 2 Painted Ladys and a Brown Argus were the best of a poor showing of butterflies.

19 July 2015. The Ruckinge team had done it again. This time it was Small Marbled (scarce migrant moth) on show. A late phone call had us going to Oare Marshes where 2 Temmincks Stints and 2 Curlew Sandpipers were on show. Excellent numbers of Gatekeepers and 31 Common Emerald Damselfies bought the day to a most enjoyable conclusion.

20 July 2015. A twitter message from the Observatory Warden had us heading to Dungeness where a Orache Moth, Brussels Lace and another Splendid Brocade were on show. What a good period of moth watching/ trapping we were enjoying. Still lots of Small Coppers around.

22 July 2015. Our best butterfly day this year with the Large Tortoiseshell at St. Margarets. Supported by 40 Marbled Whites, many Chalkhill Blues, Common Blues, Small Skippers, Meadow Browns. Also a few Large Skippers, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma.

So despite the traffic problems we have managed to get out and about, or be it sometimes slowing, and seen some wonderful wildlife. Most enjoyable.



Large Tortoiseshell at St. Margarets Kent.



Large Tortoiseshell at St. Margarets Kent.



Swallowtail at undisclosed site in Norfolk. We found this low down in vegetation seeking shelter from the wind and showers.



Stripped Hawkmoth at Dungeness. A rare migrant moth, although reasonable numbers seen this year.



Bordered Straw. One of many migrants we have seen this year.



Painted Lady. There seems to be good numbers around this year.



Norfolk Hawker, but actually in Kent at Westbere.



Fen Orchid. A beautiful Orchid and one of Britains rarest orchids.



Musk Orchid in Kent



Swallowtail at undisclosed site in Norfolk. We found this low down in vegetation seeking shelter from the wind and showers.

Re: Dave Brown

by Pauline, 25-Jul-15 04:24 PM GMT

Really interesting report Dave and smashing shots to accompany. Thanks for sharing – hope traffic situation improves soon.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 26-Aug-15 12:57 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline, the traffic situation has improved considerably. Since David Cameron banged the table at the last Cobra meeting no further instances of Operation Stack has occurred. I am sure that is a coincidence but others may argue a leader taking charge. Just wish he had done it sooner rather than the residents of Kent having to suffer 23 days of traffic hell. Either way no more traffic chaos for this area, at least until the schools recommence.

25th July 2015 to 31st July 2015.

A quiet period during which time we undertook our usual Butterfly transect at Hamstreet. The only really notable feature was the high number of Peacocks (44) and Painted Lady's (6). Otherwise it was pretty much the expected species A juvenile Yellow Legged Gull and Wood Sandpiper at Dungeness on the 31st added a spark to proceedings.

01 August 2015 to 6th August 2015.

With good weather forecast it was into Beckley Woods for our annual fix of Silver Washed Fritillary. We were not disappointed with a stunning 24 being seen on our walk, supported by a White Admiral and a Painted Lady.

The, by now Adult, Bonapartes Gull has returned to Oare Marshes and the 4th produced a good sighting on the East Flood. It was joined by a returning Little Stint and 3 Curlew Sandpipers. Autumn is now here.

A search of the previously reliable site of Chislet Marshes only found 1 Willow Emerald Damsel on the 02 August. This time two years ago we found 102.

The 5th August produced a fine Oak Hook-tip, 2 Great White Egrets and a Bittern at Dungeness.

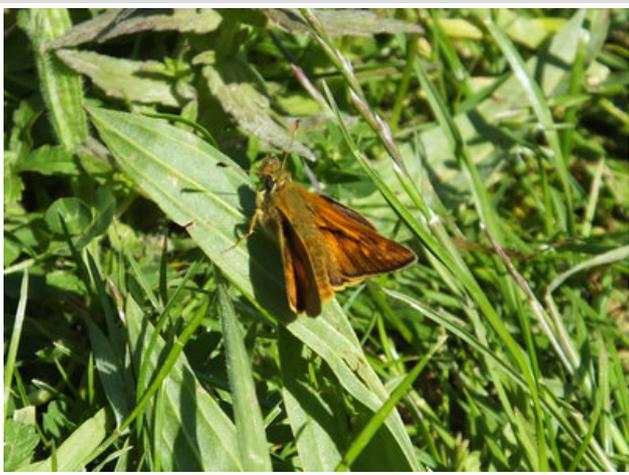
I have added a few photos from previous periods in my effort to catch up.



Heath Fritillary at East Blean Woods



Heath Fritillary at East Blean Woods.



Large Skipper at Hamstreet Woods.



Greater Butterfly Orchid near Ashford, Kent



White Admiral at Hamstreet.



Temminck's Stint at Oare Marshes.



One of many Gatekeepers in this area.



Silver Studded Blue at Ashdown Forest (East Sussex).

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 31-Aug-15 05:25 AM GMT

It's big. It's Black and it's special.

Friday 7th August 2015.

This was a special day for us, unexpected and one that we thoroughly enjoyed. We had gone to Dungeness to look for Clouded Yellows, of which we only saw one. As we arrived we received a message to say that a BLACK STORK had been seen at Hythe coming in off the sea and was last seen heading West. That would mean that if it carried on in that direction it could end up at Dungeness or Rye. Along with a few other Dungeness regulars we scanned the skies from a number of vantage points. Over one and a quarter hours later there was still no sign. Being that as birds fly, especially big birds, it should have only taken 30-40 minutes at most, it was therefore assumed to have bypassed Dungeness. We got in the car and was about to carry on birding/ butterflying when we caught a glimpse of a very distant bird which could only have been a Stork. It was really distant and disappeared almost immediately. I made a call to the nearest person and we met minutes later looking towards Rye. It was indeed a Black Stork. To our surprise, and delight it then headed back across Lydd Ranges and eventually passed right over our head. We managed to contact others nearby and about 15 people managed to connect. We have been birding for 30 years and this is only the second one we have seen in Kent. It stayed on view for about 35 minutes before appearing to head back north west.

Saturday 8th August 2015.

To counter the excitement of yesterday, today we visited Chislet Marshes and only found 4 Willow Emerald Damselflies. Two years ago we found 102 at the site of what was then a recent colonist. Not sure of the reason for this dramatic fall in numbers. Hopefully it's just a temporary blip.

We ended the day at Kingsdown near Deal seeing 22 second brood Small Blues. This is a charming butterfly and gave us great enjoyment. Worryingly planning permission has been given for some house building at this location. Mitigation measures have been put in place following lobbying by several Conservation groups and individuals. We shall see if these are successful in helping the colony survive.

Sunday 9th August 2015.

Wall to wall sunshine and Wall to Wall butterflies. In fact 5 and 11 respectively, Wall Browns at two locations at Wye NNR. Supported by decent numbers of Chalkhill Blues, Common Blues, Brown Argus, Small Skippers, Red Admirals, Small Heaths, Peacocks, Holly Blues and a Comma. We also saw a Clouded Yellow and 3 Painted Lady's.

Wednesday 12th August 2105.

Oare marshes produced a very good wader in the form of a WHITE RUMPED SANDPIPER, supported by 2 Little Stints, Curlew Sandpiper and a Whimbrel. Butterflies were very thin on the ground with nothing of note.

Friday 14th August 2015.

A much better day for butterflies at Dungeness. In addition to the many Small Coppers, Small Heaths and Meadow Browns we found a late Marbled White, still in decent condition, and a Clouded Yellow. Moths at the Observatory included Hummingbird Hawkmoth, Small Mottled Willow, Blood Vein and 2 Langmaids.

Attached are a few of our moth photographs taken this summer.



The Black Stork which flew over our heads at Dungeness. (Photo kindly taken by Ploddingbirder standing alongside us).



Splendid Brocade at Dungeness. A good year for this species here in Kent. With an inland one at Ruckinge.



Our very own Bordered Straw. The first we have ever caught in our garden.



Dusky Hooktip at Ruckinge.



Orange Moth taken at Ruckinge. A most butterfly like moth.



The photo does not do justice to the large size of this crane fly, taken at Dungeness.

Re: Dave Brown

by Pauline, 31-Aug-15 03:11 PM GMT

Reading your post I can feel your excitement Dave and having seen the photo (well done to Ploddingbirder) I can understand why. Always a wide range of interesting sightings from you which makes for great reading.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 17-Sep-15 04:36 AM GMT

Thanks Pauline for your kind comments.

I am well behind again in my Diary updates. I think its because I would rather be out in the field than stuck on a keyboard. I do consider stopping them for a while but then again feel that they are a record of our wildlife exploits and I do find it interesting writing them, bringing back often fond memories Whoever can invent a eight day week will be a multi-millionaire.

15th August 2015.

A warm day spent around the Hamstreet / Kennardington area found a returning migrant Pied Flycatcher, a local Turtle Dove and good numbers of Butterflies and Damselies, including 5 Red Eyed Damselies.

16th August 2105.

Another warm day spent covering the same ground. This time the Pied Flycatcher had moved on to be replaced by 3 Greenshanks. The Royal Military Canal produced 2 Small Red Damselies in addition to the usual Red Eyes. It was nice to see a flock of 65 House Martins feeding over the Canal.

The strings of Dungeness were pulling again and did not disappoint with good numbers of returning Sand Martins, a Raven, Spotted Flycatcher and 2 Whinchats. The area around the Observatory gave Painted Lady, Red Admiral, 4 Common Blue, Small Heath and the regular Small Coppers.

17th August 2015.

By way of a change we visited Oare Marshes where the WHITE RUMPED SANDPIPER was still on show, joined by 2 Little Stints, Greenshank and 4 Curlew Sandpipers. Butterflies were disappointing with only Meadow Brown, Large White and Small Heath noted.

19th August 2015.

Back to Dungeness where the place was alive with Sand Martins (many hundreds). 2 Spoonbills and 5 Wood Sandpipers were enjoyable but insects were hard work with only Common Blues and Small Coppers making the note book.

20th August 2015.

A Mega moth day at Dungeness. On show was a Bedstraw Hawkmoth. What a stunner, what a delightful insect and one that attracted a number of admirers. It was a good day for insects with a Clouded Yellow, 2 Hummingbird Hawkmoths, Pine Hawkmoth, 10 plus Common Blues, 25 plus Meadow Browns and numerous Small Coppers. Our first Merlin of the Autumn was noted.

21st August 2015.

The sun was shining and Lydden beckoned. On show was a stunning display of butterflies. 21 Silver Spotted Skippers was the icing on the cake but the cake also contained 3 Clouded Yellows, 3 Wall Browns, 17 Adonis Blues, 150 plus Chalkhill Blues, numerous Common Blues and Meadow Browns. The best showing of Autumn Gentian I have noted for some time and 2 Autumn Ladies Tresses coming into flower.

We also caught our first ever Bordered Straw in the garden moth trap.

22nd August 2015.

Our Autumn visit to Ashdown Forest was a pleasing one with 5 Black Darters, 3 Golden Ringed Dragonflies, 4 Small Red Damselflies and 5 Keeled Skimmers of note. A Clouded Yellow, 20 Common Blues and dozens of Meadow Browns were a delight in the warm sunshine, as was the Ice Cream bought in the car park.

23rd – 27th August 2015.

The highlight of the next few days was the finding by the ever vigilant Observatory Warden who not only found a new species of insect to Britain but followed it with a second sighting of one only seen a couple of times before. He skillfully identified a first for Britain based on call. That is the TREE CRICKET. Not only that but further searches have revealed a small breeding colony. Such has been the interest that he has led evening walks to listen to the singing Crickets and even had a visit by BBC film crew. The second find was also a Cricket. This time the Sickle-bearing Bush Cricket. The numbers of the latter are much lower and I believe the maximum number found is 6. Well done to DW who again finds something really good when you think it could not get better.

During the same period the following were also seen Speckled Bush Cricket, Jersey Tiger, Scarce Bordered Straw, Vestral and Hummingbird Hawkmoth. The sea was not neglected with us noting 6 Balearic Shearwaters, Pomarine Skua, 6 Black Terns and 7 Arctic Skuas. The stuff of dreams.

28th – 31st August 2015.

Continued sightings of the Crickets occurred whenever the weather was suitable. It was also about Birds now as migration got underway. Good numbers of Whinchats, Wheatears, Willow Warblers, Whitethroats and Yellow Wagtails seen. A White Winged Black Tern was seen on the ARC pit, together with 8 Black Terns, Garganey, Whimbrel and Raven. For the second time this month we were in the right place when 4 Honey Buzzards passed over Dengmarsh together with a few Common Buzzards. Butterflies were not neglected with another Clouded Yellow and Painted Lady seen. You can't always see everything as we missed an Osprey fly over the ARC pit despite us being nearby.

The good moths continued with more Scarce Bordered Straws, Dusky Hook-tip and best of all, PORTERS RUSTIC. A non-descript, but very rare moth to the British Isles (thanks IR).

That concludes another thoroughly enjoyable period of wildlife watching and one that makes our hobby so interesting and exciting.



Silver Washed Fritillary at Beckley Woods (East Sussex)



Silver Washed Fritillary at Beckley Woods (East Sussex).



Wall Brown.



Chalkhill Blue at Lydden



Distant photo of the White Rumped Sandpiper at Oare Marshes.



Spotted Redshank at Sandwich Bay.



One of many Sand Martins at Dungeness this past month.

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 19-Sep-15 01:32 AM GMT

Great photos Dave, it looks like I left Kent too soon, I went to Lydden loads of times for SSS and Adonis, no luck, I'll have to try a later date next time to leave 😊 Goldie 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 22-Sep-15 02:02 AM GMT

Thanks Goldie. The same problem we all have when booking a holiday is to judge the Butterfly season correctly. Being that some species can be up to 2 weeks early or 2 weeks later that's a big margin of error to achieve the species at it's best. When we do get it right all the more reason to enjoy it.

01 September 2015.

The day a Long Tailed Blue was seen, and photographed, at Dungeness National Nature Reserve, near the Old Lighthouse. Despite a dozen or so of us searching the area immediately following the sighting it was never found again. Not surprising really as there is no Everlasting Pea within this part of the NNR to hold it. We assume that it was on it's migration into Britain and was part of the general influx recorded at other Southern locations. The search of the area did turn up lots of the migrant moths Vestal and Rush Veneer. We ended the day watching an Osprey fly out to sea in the general direction of France. For some reason Ospreys do not hang around the Dungeness area despite the presence of several large pits and the RSPB Reserve.

02 September 2015.

Following yesterdays sighting of the LTB today we planned to check more locations where the Everlasting Pea is known. The weather turned as soon as we started so our search will be for another day. A Long Eared Owl was very showy at Sandwich Bay.

03 September 2015.

Our visit to Dungeness was very successful with Cattle Egret, 2 Great White Egrets and a Red Backed Shrike seen. Lots of the expected Butterflies were seen with Small Coppers in particular being numerous. Moths were represented by the very impressive CONVULVULUS HAWKMOTH, 3 Vestals and a Scarce Bordered Straw.

04 September 2015.

Our Butterfly transect was a disappointment in sunny but cool weather. Only Red Admiral, Meadow Brown and a Gatekeeper were noted.

05 September 2015.

We undertook our second Butterfly transect in warmer weather but numbers were still low, with 6 Brimstone, 8 Red Admiral and 7 Speckled Wood. On to Dungeness where Thursday's Red Backed Shrike and Cattle Egret was still showing. Also 2 Ravens, 3 Hobby's and good numbers of Blackcaps, Willow Warblers and Whitethroats were present.

08 September 2015.

By way of a change Pett Level was visited. The main feature was the movement of Swallows and Sand Martins all heading North. Later in the day we called in at our friends at Ruckinge to see our second ever MARSH MALLOW Moth. A British Red Data species only known from 2 sites.

Another enjoyable period of wildlife watching.



Black Darter at Ashdown Forest.



Common Emerald Damselfly at Oare Marshes.



Small Red Damselfly at Ashdown Forest.



This rare Funnel Cloud was captured from Dungeness just as it was disappearing.



The increasingly rare Turtle Dove at Warehorne. Sorry about the poor quality but the light was really dull.

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 23-Sep-15 03:26 AM GMT

I really enjoy your reports, Dave. You've got one hell of a range of wildlife down there.

I don't think I've seen a turtle dove in the UK since I was a kid. Excellent find.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 25-Sep-15 03:25 AM GMT

A TRIO OF FLYCATCHERS

Before I undertake the next stage of my diary, and in case anyone is wondering, I do not post any photos of the Small Copper at Dungeness for the time being. Hoggars has that market well and truly tied up 😊. I am still seeing good numbers there but now rarely even get the camera out. I can't better his photos of this species so there is no point in trying.

9th September 2015.

Another day at Dungeness and another high point when a White Winged Black Tern was present on the ARC pit.

10th September 2015.

The Siskin invasion continues apace. Today we had a few in the Hamstreet Woods complex. Butterflies included 10 Red Admirals and 7 Brimstone.
11th September 2015.

A visit to Oare Marshes produced the hoped for Clouded Yellow, infact two. Not sure why this North facing coastal reserve is so good for them but we seen them here for years around this time. Also present 4 Small Heath, Common Blue and a Silver Y.

12th September 2015.

A visit to Dungeness was rewarded with a Ni Moth (migrant) and Pearly Underwing. The Ni moth can be very scarce in Britain some years, but this year looks like being a decent one for them. Migrant birds continue to appear with at least 3 Whinchats, 2 Wheatears and 15 Yellow Wagtails around.

13th September 2015.

Another visit to Dungeness. This time the Delicate and 2 Scarce Bordered Straws were trapped overnight. Migrant birds increased with 4 Lesser Whitethroats, 2 Blackcaps and more Yellow Wagtails, Wheatears, Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs.

15th September 2015.

A Cattle Egret flew over us along Dengemarsh (Dungeness) as we walked the area. Can't tell if its one of last years returning birds but just as likely to be a fresh bird as numbers have been appearing elsewhere. Really nice was a scarce Bee, *Bombus ruderatus*, at the Observatory. A first for us. Apparently it s becoming more regular on Romney Marsh so hopefully we will some more over the coming years.

17th September 2015.

A feature of today was the very high numbers present around Dungeness and Walland Marsh of Swallows, Sand Martins and House Martins. The Swallows were numbered in their thousands. Every field seemed to be full of them sweeping across feeding on unseen insects. To add to the more common migrant birds today we saw a Spotted Flycatcher, Redstart and Grey Wagtail. Every bush seemed to hold Chiffchaffs or Whitethroats.

19th September 2015.

Another day of good migrant activity at Dungeness. Still thousands of Swallows, Sand and House Martins. Chiffchaffs everywhere. The half dozen Pine trees at the ARC pit held 20 plus Chiffchaffs, Lesser Whitethroat and 5 Goldcrests. Over 50 Chiffchaffs were along Dengemarsh Road. Whittthroat, Redstart, Whinchat and Wheatear seen. 7 Common Buzzards and 2 Hobbys plus the Cattle Egret and 2 Great White Egrets enhanced the interest. Butterflies were harding to find but did include Small Copper, Red Admiral and Small White. Moths saw another Scarce Bordered Straw, Blood-vein and Rush Veneer.

20th September 2015.

A bit of a repeat at Dungeness although numbers were lower as some birds appeared to have moved on. A Clouded Yellow was nice as was a Convolvulus Hawkmoth, Feathered Brindle and Lunar Underwing. A feature of today was the high number of Migrant Hawkets and Common Darters still on the wing. Many of the Darters were coupled ensuring next years generation.

22nd September 2015.

Today was a day of committed family things including one that could not be missed, or the time changed. A very good neighbour had passed away and today was the celebration of his life. It was not a thing that we would ever consider missing, so when we received a telephone call to say that a mega bird had literally just been found at Dungeness I just shrugged my shoulders and explained the situation to the finder. A few minutes, and a family huddle later, a decision was made to juggle everything else around apart for the one thing we could not miss. This meant we had 3 hours to twitch the bird and get back. Headless Chicken panic was on. Picking up only our binoculars, camera and macs (it was pouring hard), we were off. Getting caught behind every slow moving car and lorry ever on the road did not help but we eventually arrived at the fishing boats to find only about a dozen people walking around aimlessly. It appeared that the bird had flown less than 5 minutes before we arrived. The weather was still drizzle so the bird was unlikely to have flown far and so it proved. 20 minutes later a call went up and we all started walking fast, (or even running 😊). The twitch was back on. And there it was, right in front of us, an American Flycatcher showing well and feeding actively.

It's actual identity has still to be positively confirmed. There are several species that look almost identical but the photographs seem to confirm Acadian Flycatcher, which is a first for Europe. Probably a result of the recent remnants of the Hurricane that crossed the Atlantic. We spent about 20 minutes with the bird before returning to make our commitment in plenty of time.

About 1,000 birders saw it that day, it even made the BBC News and various National papers, but was not seen again.

This sighting meant we had seen Pied, Spotted and Acadian Flycatcher in just over a week, all at Dungeness. Hence, the trio title.



Acadian Flycatcher at Dungeness near the fishing boats.



Pied Flycatcher at Dungeness.



Spotted Flycatcher at Dungeness.



Clouded Yellow



Long Eared Owl showing well for a change, at Sandwich Bay.



Red Backed Shrike on the RSPB Dungeness.



Jersey Tiger moth at Dungeness.



Rush Veneer moth. This one was photographed on our Butterfly Transect at Hamstreet.

Re: Dave Brown

by Hoggers, 25-Sep-15 05:32 AM GMT

Dave, you most certainly should post pictures of Small Coppers!

The more the better!

Congratulations on seeing the rare Flycatcher

Best wishes

Hoggers

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 25-Sep-15 06:12 PM GMT

Hi! Dave, your selection of different subjects is great and a real change, I love that Long Eared Owl photo, I'd have been really excited to see that and the photo of the Jersey Moth which I've not seen yet and to see that rare bird as well, Great, you've certainly had a really good September up to now. 😊
Goldie 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 12-Oct-15 04:02 AM GMT

Thanks Goldie, much appreciated.

After the excitement of the Acadian Flycatcher, which incidentally has been confirmed as that species from an impressive range of photos and DNA analysis of its droppings, thus a first for Europe, it was always going to feel a bit flat. Especially as Butterflies and Moths were getting thin on the ground. Despite much searching by many people no Long Tailed Blues have been seen at Dungeness in October. The Narrow Leaved Everlasting Pea has so far failed to deliver. A few Common Blues still on the wing get the heart beating for a few seconds, but their numbers are dwindling fast.

So onto the current period.

23rd September 2015 to 26th September 2015.

Visits were mainly local but did allow us to catch up with the Pectoral Sandpiper and Ruff on Conningbrook (near Ashford). This is the site of a new

Country Park, although I fear it is more for the sports facilities and the general public than the wildlife opportunities. There are currently no wildlife meadows to attract butterflies, or other insects. It's been funded by a proposed large new housing development adjacent to the park. Only time will tell who benefits.

Sunday 27 September 2015.

Back to Dungeness for the day. A few Small Coppers, one Common Blue and a few Small Heaths were still on the wing. A Bittern was watched on Dengemarsh and a total of 7 Whinchats were seen.

Monday 28 September 2015.

I suppose the most memorable event was waking up at the unearthly hour of 03.00 in clear skies to witness the Eclipse of the Moon and the Blood Red act associated with it. I must say that it was most impressive and worth the sleepy eyes the rest of the day. We again visited Conningbrook CP but the Pectoral Sandpiper and Ruff had moved on.

Tuesday 29 September 2015.

The sun was out and Dungeness beckoned. Butterflies were much the same as Sunday although numbers slightly up and this time joined by a few Small Whites, Migrant Hawkers and Common Darters. There had been a small fall of migrant birds including a smashing Yellow Browed Warbler, 4 Firecrests (in my view one of Britains smartest birds), 7 Continental Coal Tits and a Black Redstart.

Wednesday 30 September 2015

Back to Dungeness for a repeat performance. Still many Swallows were around but House Martin numbers were reduced.

Friday 02 October 2015.

Yes, you've guessed. Another trip to Dungeness. The weather was warmer and this time a few Red Admirals joined the Small Coppers. The Yellow Browed Warbler had departed but there was still a few Firecrests on offer. The summer feel was enhanced by the sightings of Hobby and 4 Yellow Wagtails. Migrant Hawker numbers if anything had increased with many Common Darters still paired up.

Saturday 03 October 2015.

We can't keep going to Dungeness so today it was bucket and spade time, well Margate at least. It is possible to get away from the crowds so today saw us watching 8 Speckled Woods and 6 Red Admirals for a change. A quite spot in the local cemetery found another Yellow Browed Warbler and Firecrest, together with a 100 plus Goldcrests.

Monday 05 October 2015.

What a change weather wise. Heavy rain, wind and cold. It therefore came as quite a surprise when a good friend at Hythe let it be known that he had trapped a SOMBRE BROCADE moth. Wow, with just a few records for Dorset, Cornwall and one in Hampshire, this was not a moth on our radar for Kent. To be confirmed, but it appears to be the first record for Kent, so only one thing for it. Out into the rain and cold. Looking a bit like a Green Brindled Beauty, but without the Green, it was well worth the drive and well deserved by the finder who puts a lot of effort into his local area.

Not quite catch up, especially as I have yet to download the photos, but later in the week brings a few more surprises.

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 23-Oct-15 01:44 AM GMT

Autumn is here.

It's no surprise that insect activity is winding down, especially with the periods of cold and wet weather we have had. We have still managed a decent selection of Butterflies and Moths but in general the moth trap has been very quiet. We have had to rely on others to provide a good variety of interesting moths.

On the Butterfly front we are still seeing Small Coppers, Peacocks, Red Admirals and Speckled Woods, but it's getting harder.

The main Butterfly highlights have been, Small Heath (6th Oct), Clouded Yellow (8th at Dungeness), 3 Small Heaths (8th).

The following are still being seen most days, Red Admiral, Small Copper (Dungeness visits), Small White, with Large White and Peacock less regular.

On the moth front we saw a Hummingbird Hawkmoth (8th Oct at Dungeness), Four Spotted Footman (8th at Dungeness), Mallow Moth (13th Oct at Dungeness), Bloxworth Snout (16th Oct at Dungeness), and finally an usual record of Feathered Brindle well inland at our good friends at Ruckinge. This latter species is scarce and normally restricted to the Coastal areas of the South East so a good find indeed in a well wooded and grassland area.

Dragonflies have been down to two species for a little while with only Common Darter and Migrant Hawker being seen.

Bird activity has been interesting. A general lack of scarce and rare species but some common migrants have been in very good numbers. In particular Siskins, Redpolls and Goldfinches have been seen in very high numbers. House Martins and Swallows are also in good numbers. Goldcrests and Chiffchaffs seem to be in every bush and even Reed Bunting numbers seem higher than most years.

A few other highlights have been Pied Flycatcher (6th Oct at Dungeness), 2 Whinchats (9th Oct at Dungeness), 7 Ring Ouzels (12th Oct at Folkestone), 2 Crossbills (16th Oct at Dungeness).

The only scarce bird seen was on the 9th October. Whilst scanning the skies at Dungeness for Common Buzzard passage (17 seen), our son picked up a very large bird flying in off the sea and over the Power Station. It turned out to be a Common Crane which circled around for about 20 minutes before landing on the RSPB reserve. Just about an annual visitor to Kent it is still a special bird to see. There was no rings present so we all assume it was a genuine migrant from the Continent and not one of the introduced ones from the West Country. Another special day.

Of non nature interest was a sighting of the Vulcan Bomber on the 11th October. It flew along the coast between Medway and Sandwich as part of its farewell display before being retired. Impressive to say the least. Judging by the large crowds it will be badly missed.



Sombre Brocade. A very welcome surprise (and lifer) at Hythe. Caught in a private garden moth trap.



Yellow Browed Warbler at the Old Lighthouse, Dungeness



Comma at Dungeness



Four Spotted Footman moth at Dungeness



A distant photo of the flying Common Crane at Dungeness (just left of the Water Tower).



Coal Tit of the Continental race at Dungeness

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 14-Nov-15 01:44 AM GMT

Warm, Sunny and unseasonal.

I realise that some parts of the Country have not had it so good but here in Kent the weather has been unusually warm. I can't remember a November when we have seen so many wild flowers at Dungeness still in bloom, or on a second bloom. Not just one or two flowers but large numbers. Sea Campion, Thrift and Nottingham Catchfly to name a few. A Botanist staying at the Observatory has so far recorded 129 species in flower during November. This is unheard of and is a interesting talking point. Although Common Darters and Migrant Hawks are still on the wing, as are Red Admirals and Peacocks, insects have not responded to the warm weather in the same way. Indeed Moth numbers are distinctly down in actual numbers although variety of species is still good.

The warm weather has also brought mixed fortunes to the bird migration. Winter species like the Short Eared Owl are in very good numbers but Fieldfares, Redwings and Woodcock are still in low numbers compared to most years.

So what have we been doing in addition to enjoying the sunshine. Well mixed fortunes really. We have seen some good things, missed others and occasionally wished we had travelled for rarer things. Like the Pallid Harrier in West Sussex and Pallid Swift at Margate. The very recent Craig Martin at Chesterfield is probably a little too far for us although it is still there today and will surely draw a big crowd tomorrow (Saturday).

On the 18th October we did look for a Pallas's Warbler at Seasalter but dipped. Also no luck with the Great Grey Shrike at Herne Bay, but we did connect with a Dartford Warbler at the same site. Dartford Warbler in Kent is a good bird. We do not have the habitat of Hampshire and Dorset so rely on migrants in the Autumn and Winter months. On the 19th we saw another 4 Short Eared Owls at Dungeness and surely fresh migrants as the others had not been seen for a few days. The Observatory Warden had found a Rough Legged Buzzard at Scotney late on the 19th, so the 20th found us at the site. After a few hours the bird hunted and showed very well to the assembled crowd of 3 increasing to 8 when we broadcast the news. Not many birders for what remains a good Kent bird.

The next good day was the 23rd October when, looking for the Rough Legged Buzzard, news came through of a Barred Warbler trapped at the Observatory. I thought we were quick to arrive but about a dozen others beat us to it. A very nice bird and even better to see in the hand rather than skulking in a bush, which is the way of this particular species. Arriving back at Scotney not only did we see the Rough Legged Buzzard but also another Short Eared Owl.

Next day, the 24th October, we managed to see a Great Grey Shrike on the RSPB Reserve and a Brindle Green moth at the Obs.

The 25th produced a 2nd winter Caspian Gull, 2 Black Necked Grebes, 2 Ravens and another Dartford Warbler on the Reserve. This was also the last day that we saw the Rough Legged Buzzard on Scotney as it appears to have now moved on. This was also the day we saw our last Meadow Brown of the year and was actually in decent condition.

Thanks to the locals a highly mobile, but very welcome, Dusky Warbler was found near the Power Station on the 26th. It showed on and off for a few hours before disappearing into a private area. A feature of the day was an amazing fall of Black Redstarts. It was estimated up to 40 present of which we saw 12. This is a species that was fairly scarce until the nineties but is now much more frequent in Kent. Today was the day we saw our last Painted Lady of 2015.

The 28th October was a good day for Red Admirals with at least 8 different individuals being seen. Another sighting of the Dusky Warbler, now in a public area, and a new Yellow Barred Warbler in the Lighthouse garden.

The 29th was good for sea watching, with a Sooty Shearwater passing close in being the best. A 3rd winter Yellow Legged Gull was in the roost.

A Red Flanked Bluetail had been present at Sandwich Bay for over a week. It was generally very elusive with many spending hours there and not seeing it. Every now and again it would be retrapped and shown to those present, much to the relief of many birders. Some days it was not seen at all. So the 31st October found us arriving with low expectations and fearing a very long wait. We parked up, walked to the area and there was a ringer with the bird in his hand. Talk about jam in on something. No long wait, no boring looking in every bare bush, no false alarms as some little brown job moved a few hundred metres away. No missing a brief glimpse of the bird as some giant of a person with a telephoto camera and telescope stands in everyone's way. Quite understandably the Ringer did not hold the bird up for photographs as it had been retrapped a few times, but we still managed a photograph as he opened his hand to release the bird.

The 1st November saw another Dartford Warbler along Dengemarsh. Our last Large White and Small Tortoiseshell of the year. Best of all though was 2 late Clouded Yellows enjoying the sunshine in Dengemarsh Gully.

Saving the best to last. We can now report that we saw 2 Long Tailed Blues at an undisclosed site in Kent on the 2nd September 2015. We were asked by locals not to disclose the location because of what happened at Kingsdown in 2013. Sorry team. As it happens I don't think they were seen again after this date so releasing the news would not have benefited others and would have resulted in wasted journeys. Hopefully 2016 will bring a lot more sightings and the opportunity to share in the good news with others.



Long Tailed Blue at undisclosed location in Kent.



Red Flanked Bluetail about to be released at Sandwich Bay.



Barred Warbler at Dungeness Observatory.



Barred Warbler at Dungeness Observatory.



Clouded Yellow at Dungeness.



Yellow Legged Gull Dungeness Beach.



Great White Egret on Dungeness RSPB.



This Teal was one of many on Oare Marshes.



A late flowering Foxglove (Nov 11th) on Dungeness RSPB.

Re: Dave Brown

by David M, 17-Nov-15 06:04 AM GMT

Some surprising images there, Dave. As you say, autumn has been ridiculously mild and I'm not sure this does our native species many favours. For me, a nice week long cold snap would be welcome.

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 18-Nov-15 10:19 PM GMT

Great shots Dave, I envy the Long Tailed Blue 🦋🦋 Goldie 😊

Re: Dave Brown

by CJB, 19-Nov-15 07:23 PM GMT

Hi Dave,

I love reading your reports of birding alongside butterflies; keep them coming!

Flutter on!

CJB

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 23-Dec-15 08:17 PM GMT

One Swallow does not make a Summer

When seen in December though it certainly makes you think of Summer. What a crazy month weather wise here in Kent. Whilst many elsewhere have suffered with wind and heavy rain we have mainly basked in warmth and sunshine. So far in December we have seen a Common Swift (7th December at Margate), a Swallow (4th December at Dungeness) and a Mega moth in the form of STRIPPED HAWKMOTH (19th December at Dungeness). On the 19th December, whilst walking in shirt sleeves at Dungeness, the temperature reached 16 degrees. It felt more like a June day, especially when the Hawkmoth was trapped. It seemed weird basking in summer like sunshine while watching Smew, Goldeneye, Caspian Gull and eating mince pieces (mulled wine was also available but we were driving). Even more strange is the sight of large numbers of Brent Geese heading north up channel in

December. Normally this happens in late February/ early March. If it carries on like this we will be seeing large numbers of butterflies by February. There is a down side to this warm weather. Bird numbers here in Kent are way down. Very few Fieldfares, Redwings or Waxwings have arrived from the Continent. The number of species we see each day is way down on a normal December. As they say, things can only get better. The highlights so far have been adult Caspian Gull (7th Nov), 7 Brambling (8th Nov), a superb male Hen Harrier (10th Nov near Stodmarsh), Yellow Legged Gull (17th Nov), Red Admiral (17th Nov). A brilliant seawatch on the 21 November in gale force winds near Minnis Bay produced Sooty Shearwater, Great Skua, Little Auk and Pomarine Skua. Black Necked Grebe (23rd Nov), Caspian Gull (28th Nov), Taiga Bean Goose (5th Dec), Glossy Ibis (26th Nov at Pett Level). Throughout most of this period a Long Eared Owl has been showing most days very close to the Visitors Centre on the RSPB at Dungeness.

Despite the warm weather the only other moths we have seen are Scarce Umber, Mottled Umber and Feathered Thorn. All at our good friends at Ruckinge.

Not much more to add to this update although I will add a few photos over Xmas.

Happy Christmas to all. Best wishes.
Dave

Re: Dave Brown

by dave brown, 30-Dec-15 04:05 AM GMT

Then the Weather Turns.

Of course it had to happen. No sooner had I said how good the weather was then it changed. Still mild, but now wet and windy. One thing it has not done is changed the birds and other wildlife we are seeing. Still no big influxes of anything. Still the same birds and amazingly, plants. Daffodils are common at the moment along sheltered banks.

Highlights have been few since our last update. A Glossy Ibis has appeared at Pett Level and can be seen most days with a bit of patience. 2 Short Eared Owls have taken up residence at Seasalter and another 2 at Swalecliffe. A Raven is also becoming regular at Seasalter and on Christmas Eve we saw a superb male Hen Harrier. I know we should have been Christmas Shopping but a male Hen Harrier is about the best Christmas present you can get when your into nature watching. We visited Oare Marshes on Christmas Day morning and much to our surprise a number of other families were also present, either bird watching or just walking. We even saw a Shop and a Garage that were open. Bird wise we have very little to add really although a flock of 100 plus Whitefronted Geese has arrived on the Isle Of Sheppey and a few on Walland Marsh, so maybe the cold weather movement has just started.

I include a few photos of recent birds to see out the old year. In the meantime best wishes to everyone for the year ahead. I hope that it is kind to you all.

Dave



This Glossy Ibis appeared at Pett Level (roadside pools) in December and is still present (29th)



Taiga Bean Goose is less than annual in Kent so this one attracted some attention.



Shoveler is a common enough winter bird but this one showed well at Stodmarsh.



This female Goosander is being seen at various locations around Dungeness RSPB.

Re: Dave Brown

by Goldie M, 31-Dec-15 11:05 PM GMT

Weathers awful here too Dave, it was lovely this morning but as since reverted back to the usual, we have no flowers here to cheer us up either. It's supped to be better tomorrow, I'll believe it when I see it 😞 Goldie 😊