



The Leeds Naturalist 2020

Way back in 2019, which seems an eternity ago, we were preparing to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Leeds Naturalists' Club & Scientific Association. At the time I don't suppose people took much notice of a mystery illness reported in China around the turn of the year. However, as Covid-19 spread around the world in early 2020, we first had to cancel our Bioblitz, then indoor meetings and finally field meetings during the summer. At the time of writing, the Covid situation is far from over, although the onset of vaccinations gives some hope and we do have some plans for 2021 (see p4).

At the beginning of 2020 we also had the very sad news of the deaths of both Gavin Boyd and John Bowers, within about a week of each other. Both had been very active members of Leeds Naturalists' and their loss has had a major impact on the Club, as well, of course, on their families and friends. Gavin joined the Club in 1981, took the role of Treasurer and Lepidoptera Recorder in the late 1980s and maintained his membership even when work took him south to Northamptonshire in the early 1990s until his return north to Huddersfield in 2011. By that time his entomological interests had broadened considerably from Lepidoptera and he was an invaluable source of entomological records from Club field visits until his illness intervened in mid-2019. John Bowers joined the Club in 1998, becoming President around 2012 until he had to retire due to illness in 2019. Like Gavin, John was an enthusiastic entomologist but his expertise stretched across many different areas of natural history and he was also an excellent photographer, as witnessed by the Club through several talks he gave. He also resurrected the Club newsletter. More extensive obituaries for both Gavin and John have been published in *The Naturalist* (Gavin: April 2020 edition, p66; John: August 2020 edition, pp157-159.).

This edition of the Newsletter is significantly shorter than previous ones, not only because of the cancellation of all field meetings due to Covid-19, but also because of the lack of material submitted for inclusion.

Andy Millard

Weather report for 2020 (Leeds information from J.P.Birdsall)

January and February were variable with brief periods of settled weather but otherwise with a lot of rain and wind, making it the wettest February since 1862. In Leeds 1.15 inches of rain fell on 16 February, the wettest day of the year, and light snow fell on 24 February. A brief period of high pressure brought one of the coldest days of the year on 7 February with a temperature of -2°C in Leeds. Unsettled weather persisted into the first half of March but from then on and into most of April, while the first lockdown was in full swing, high pressure dominated and Leeds had a period from 8-28 April with no rain at all. May began with an unsettled period but for England and Wales it became the sunniest May on record. June was more unsettled but with a temperature of 21°C recorded in Leeds on 24 and 26 of the month. This unsettled pattern of brief periods of dry sunny weather interspersed with more showery intervals continued through most of the rest of the year with low temperatures of -2°C recorded in Leeds on 27 November and 4 December.

Waxcaps in Adel Churchyard

Waxcaps require unimproved grassland and are a good indicator of this declining resource. When there was a scare that the Pink Waxcap, also known as the

'Ballerina' (*Hygrocybe calyptriformis*) was endangered, we found them in 3 churchyards in Leeds, including Adel, but nowhere else. We also found there the Common Waxcap, *H. pratensis*.



Above, Pink or 'Ballerina' Waxcap and, below, Common Waxcap, both in Adel Churchyard. Photos: P. Larner.



Peter Larner

Bees, wasps & ants in a Horsforth garden

This is my first full year as Aculeate Recorder for the YNU, a very daunting task to be following on from Michael Archer! Lockdown has somewhat restricted my activities but I've definitely spent more time in the garden than usual, helping to add to the aculeate species list. 34 species of bee were recorded, including 3 species of cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus bohemicus* Bohemian Cuckoo, *B. campestris* Field Cuckoo and *B. sylvestris* Forest Cuckoo) not previously noted, probably due to my elementary identification skills rather than them being new arrivals to the area. The commonest Cuckoo Bumble in my garden is *B. vestalis* Southern Cuckoo.



Rufescent Sharp-tailed Bee. Photo: Stephen Falk.

Two interesting new records for the garden were *Coelioxys rufescens* (Rufescent Sharp-tailed bee) a cleptoparasitic species, in this area possibly of the Willughby's Leaf-cutter Bee *Megachile willughbiella* (also recorded in the garden this year) and *Stelis punctulatissima* (Banded Dark bee) another cleptoparasite, possibly of *Osmia leaiana* Orange-vented Mason Bee, also recorded in the garden. Wasp records for the garden have been thin on the ground, the social wasps being mainly *Vespula vulgaris*. The solitary wasps (*Ectemnius cavifrons*, *Pemphredon lugubris* and *Passaloecus gracilis*) were those associated annually with our standing dead Silver Birch and Pear trees. Unfortunately, the former is now decaying rather rapidly and unlikely to be standing for much longer.



Ornate Digger Wasp (*Cerceris ryebiensis*) at Brockadale, summer 2020. Photo: P.Simmons

Of more interest was the Ornate Digger Wasp *Cerceris ryebiensis* (a southern species at the edge of its range but spreading north) in Golden Acre Park.

Andy Millard



This unusual Magpie was seen in our garden during May but has not been seen since the end of that month

Peter Larnar

Parakeets in Horsforth

Quite a few years ago I think I heard a parakeet from our upstairs window but couldn't be certain and, as I wasn't aware of any more in subsequent years, thought it could well have been an escape. This year, however, two Ring-necked Parakeets were seen on 18 September in the open country just north of Horsforth and on 10 November two on the boundary of Horsforth School. The YNU 2016 Yorkshire Bird Report indicates that their stronghold was more in South Yorkshire and it was only in 2016 that there was proof of breeding. The NBN atlas suggests two records in NW Leeds in 2019 and my observations suggest the species may be becoming established in this area.

Andy Millard

Hoverflies in the garden

Hoverflies are much less frequent in our garden nowadays. The following are species seen during August/September.



Didea fasciata. Photo: P.Larnar



Episyrrhus balteatus Photo: P.Larner

Peter Larner

Leeds Naturalists' Club 2020 AGM

This year's AGM on 2 December took place on Zoom for the first time. The technology worked well but unfortunately attendance was less than ideal. Nonetheless, the feeling was that we should soldier on so the Secretary's report and accounts were accepted and Council members were kept, as far as possible, as per 2020 i.e.

President	Mary Larner
Vice-president	Peter Larner
Treasurer and membership secretary	Andy Millard
Organisation secretary	Peter Larner
Minutes secretary	Peter Larner
Programme secretary	Peter Larner
Newsletter Editor	Andy Millard
Webmaster	Genny Twigge

Likewise, there has been no change to the recorders, excepting that Phyl Abbott has had to resign as Botany recorder due to ill health:

Aculeate Hymenoptera	Dr A Millard	0113 258 2482
Birds	Mr P Larner	0113 261 2589
Botany (Higher plants, lichens & bryophytes)	Mr G Heffernan	0113 266 1273
Dragonflies & Lepidoptera	Mr P Larner	0113 261 2589
Fungi	Mrs M Larner	0113 261 2589
Vertebrates (other than birds)	Ms K Hockridge	0113 247 5558

It was agreed that in view of the cancelled meetings in 2020 the Club should waive its subscriptions for 2021 and there was some discussion of plans for this year (see p.4).

Moths on Tinshill

This has not been a good year for moths in our garden with too many cold and wet nights. However, in August I caught a species I had never seen before although it is said to be common:- the Oak Nycteoline *Nycteola revayana*, a very variable species. The identification book I use has 10 pictures to cover all the varieties.

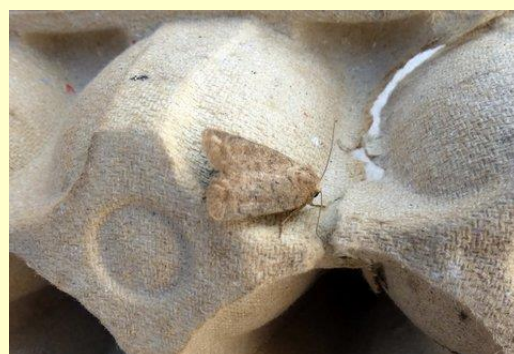


Photo: Peter Larner

Violet Carpenter Bee hitches its way to Leeds

In December I received a phone call asking whether I'd be interested in a Violet Carpenter Bee (*Xylocopa violacea*). These spectacular insects are some of the largest bees in Europe, being around 25mm in length and with a wingspan of about 45mm. They are shiny black in colour and have long dark iridescent wings with shades of blue and violet reflections. The female has powerful jaws which enable her to excavate nests in sound timber, as well as rotten wood and some hollow stems.

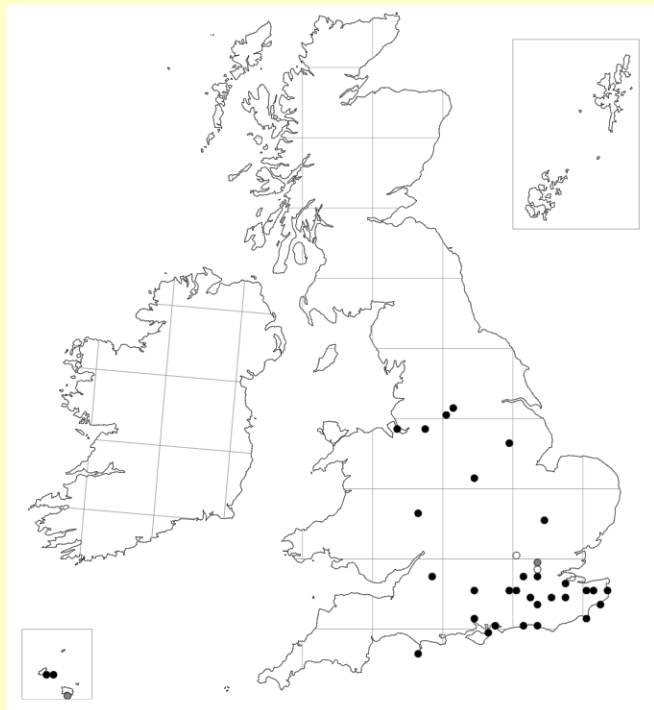


Violet Carpenter Bee. Photo: A.Millard.

The bee is common in southern Europe and up to around 1980 there were very few British records, most of which were thought to be accidental introductions in timber imports, although there is a record of one

possibly nesting in Kings Langley, Hertfordshire in 1920.

Since 1980, however, British records began to increase, particularly after the turn of the century, and the first successful breeding of the species was confirmed in Leicestershire in 2006. There are now records scattered across the southern half of England.



Distribution map for Violet Carpenter Bee. Source: <https://www.bwars.com/bee/apidae/xylocopa-violacea>

This particular bee was found when unwrapping a new ladder out of its polythene wrapping in Wakefield. It caused great consternation and a relative from Leeds was asked to come over and rescue the ladder owners. Apparently, the ladders came from Germany and it seems likely that the bee had found a space within the ladder to hibernate.

Andy Millard

Leeds Naturalists' Club Meetings in 2021

At the AGM we had a discussion about 2021 and agreed that under the present circumstances there was no point in organising a programme of indoor meetings. However, on the assumption (hopefully not over-optimistic) that things would be easing in the summer, we did think it worthwhile organising a programme of field meetings. Please note this programme (opposite) is **provisional** and do make sure you check with us nearer the date

Provisional list of Field Meetings for 2021

Thu 15 Apr	Golden Acre Park/Adel Dam/Breary Marsh. Meet at Golden Acre car park, Bramhope at 10.30am. GR SE266417
Sat 15 May	St. Aidans RSPB reserve. Meet at Fleet Lane car park, Oulton, GR SE381285 at 10.30am.
Wed 9 Jun	Rodley Nature Reserve. Meet at reserve car park at 10.30am, GR SE230362.
Tue 6 Jul	Ledsham Dale. Meet at Car Park – Holy Rood Lane, Ledsham at 10.30 am, GR SE460297.

The lack of indoor meetings at present is a great disappointment but there is an alternative, courtesy of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union (YNU). The YNU is organising a programme of meetings on Zoom to which individual YNU members and members of affiliated societies are invited. Because numbers are limited to 100 for these meetings there is a booking system through Eventbrite. When the meetings are advertised a link to Eventbrite will be provided and you can follow this to register for the meeting. A link for the meeting will then be emailed to you a day or so before it takes place.

Please note, in view of the uncertainty over this year's programme, there will not be a syllabus card issued for 2021. Please consult the website, watch out for emails or contact myself (0113 2582482) for updates on the programme.

Leeds Naturalists' Club beyond 2021

Membership of Leeds Naturalists' Club has been declining over the years, as has attendance at meetings. This has not been an uncommon phenomenon amongst some similar organisations and is probably driven by a number of factors, including increasing work and family pressures and greater use of the internet for communication and wildlife recording. Having said that, interest in the environment and a recognition of the benefits to be gained from contact with nature, particularly during lockdown, has been growing and there is undoubtedly demand amongst the population for learning about biodiversity.

However, we have now reached a critical point where there are insufficient members who are able to help with the Club. As a consequence, unless we can recruit more members and, in particular, individuals who can help with the running of the Club, I think that, after 151 years of existence, the 2021 AGM will have to be the final AGM.

Andy Millard