LEICESTERSHIRE ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

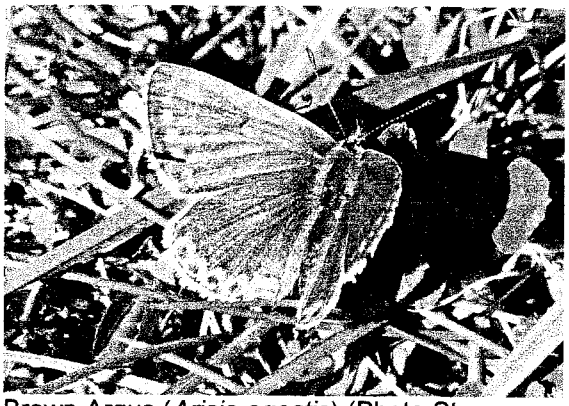
VC55

# NEWSLETTER 33

## September 2005

### Farming and Conservation working together.
### South Kilworth Disused Railway Line.

Further to the story in Newsletter 32 of our project at the small nature reserve at South Kilworth disused railway line. To reach the reserve we have to walk through farmland belonging to Parkers Farm on each side of the line a distance of approximately three quarters of a mile to the reserve.
We have in the past collected records of butterflies and moths and any other natural history subjects found as we walked to the reserve. However, we had never walked the farmland on each side of the line. On August 15th 2004 Lenny Holton and Glen McPhail decided to walk the farmland while I went to the reserve.
On entering the field of crops they were amazed to find that the farmer had left a wide belt of grass (*Circa* 20 metres) along the edge of the crop seeded with many wild flowers. The morning was sunny and provided excellent conditions for seeing butterflies and day flying moths.
Their first observations was of good numbers of Large, Small and Green veined Whites (*Pieris brassicae, rapae and napi* respectively) together with Small and Essex Skippers (*Thymelicus sylvestris* and *T. lineola*). There were also good numbers of Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*), Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*), Gate Keeper (*Pyronia tithonus*) and Meadow Browns (*Maniola jurtina*). Further along the field Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*) was abundant. Clouded Yellows (*Colias crocea*) were seen also in good numbers and, to their surprise, Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*) of which they counted 20+ individuals.



Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*) (Photo Steve Houghton)

They said that the Brown Argus seemed to be everywhere so I joined them and was able to confirm their observations for myself.
We then checked another field to see if the field margin habitat was similar to the previous field, which indeed it was. Unfortunately time had run out to make any further checks on other fields that morning.
I contacted the farmer and informed him of our observations. He told me that the seeding of the field margins had only been done twelve months ago (2003) and, the reason for undertaking this project was simply in the hope of getting a government grant for conservation.
Lenny Holton and I made another trip to the South Kilworth line on the 29th August 2004 to check all of the other fields on the farm to see if all of the other fields had been given the same treatment as the two fields already seen on our previous visit which proved to be the case. The weather conditions were good for seeing flying insects and we recorded the following butterflies:- Clouded Yellow (7), Brown Argus (5 colonies), Common Blue, Painted Lady, Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*), Small Copper, Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*), Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), Large, Small and Green veined Whites. This certainly seemed to indicate that the farmer's strategy was working.
We made further visits on the 4th September and 3rd October but autumn had set in and no further observations were made.

**LEICESTERSHIRE**

**ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

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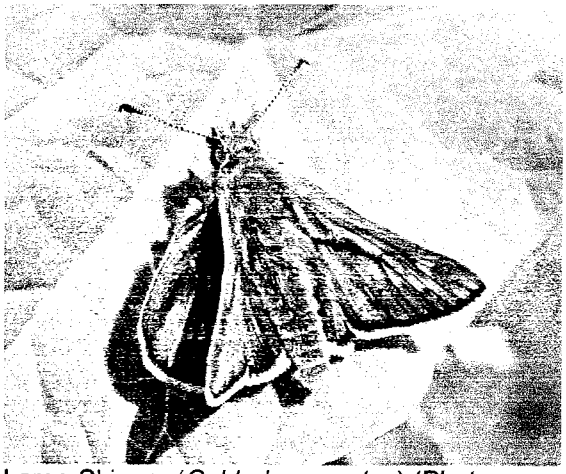
**Next Copy Deadline:**

January 2006

I spoke to the farmer again that summer to ask if there were any other farms in Leicestershire or Rutland that were adopting the same methods. He said that one of their farms in Rutland at Ridlington (SK3801) was using the same method.

We paid a visit to this farm on the 22nd August 2004. The manager there gave us a map of the farm and it was obvious from this that the farm covered a considerable area. We could therefore only walk a small section of the farm that morning.

I selected a section of the farm and we set out on our walk; the fields were indeed similar in the way they were managed to those of South Kilworth with broad swathes of flower meadows on the edges of their edges. We saw good numbers of the day flying moths, for example, Silver Y (*Autographa gamma f. gammina*), Shaded Broad-bar (*Scotopteryx chenopodiata*), Common Carpet (*Epirrhoe a. alternata*) and Cinnabar (*Tyria jacobaeae*) and also good numbers of Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Small and Large Skipper(*Thymelicus sylvestris* & *Ochlodes venatus*), Orange Tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*), Small, Large and Green Veined Whites, Small Tortoiseshell, Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) and Speckled Wood (*P.* (*Aglais urticae*) *aegeria*). In this first field, the swathe went across the field through the crops. Walking along this swathe we saw good numbers of Common Blue and Painted lady. Considering that the weather conditions that day were poor, and the previous night had been cold, it was a good result.



Large Skipper (*Ochlodes venatus*) (Photo Steve Houghton)

Lenny Holten visited this farm again on the 31st October 2004 but saw few butterflies or other insects: this was not entirely surprising as it was late in the year and weather conditions poor.

This concludes the account of two landowners, one of whom has turned a section of disused railway line into a nature reserve and the other, by planting refuges around and across his

fields, demonstrates that intensive farming can work hand in hand with the conservation of wildlife.

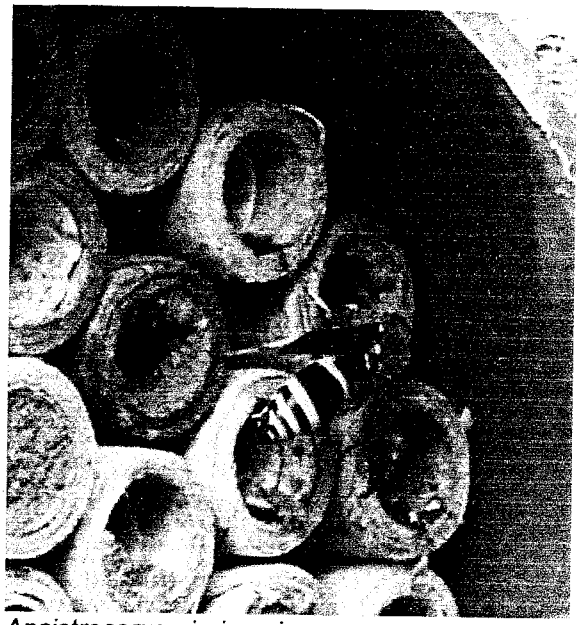
**Harry Ball**

## Experiences with garden bee boxes

Following Chris O'Toole's talk on bees to the Leicester Lit. & Phil. NHS some three years ago I bought a couple of the Oxford Bee Co. boxes for my garden. One was supposedly for the Tawny Mining Bee *Osmia rufa*, and the other, with smaller diameter tubes, for the Blue Mining Bee *Osmia caerulescens*. I fixed both boxes facing south, the *O. rufa* box under the house eaves, where this species has nested before in gaps in the roof tile mortar, and the other wired to the garden fence nearby. The *O. rufa* box was unused until summer 2005 (2 tubes) but the box with smaller tubes was occupied in 2003 and 2004. I was pleased about this as I had never noticed *O. caerulescens* in my garden and was eagerly waiting to see them emerge. I mentioned this to Maggie Frankum and she asked me to check whether the used tubes were sealed with soil or with green leaves as this distinguishes the two species. The tubes were sealed with soil, which indicated *O.rufa* – obviously mine preferred the smaller diameter tubes. This was confirmed this spring when I saw up to five males buzzing around the box waiting for females to emerge.

To give the history of the used box in a bit more detail: in 2003 out of a total of 37 available tubes 5 were used, and in 2004 16 tubes were used, all capped with soil. By March 2005 one of these was fully opened and four had been partially opened by some unknown agency. Of these four I wondered whether some parasite had either come out or gone in as the tube opening was still half blocked with soil, but one can only guess at the causer; the damage could have been by birds as my bird feeders are within ten feet and tits and sparrows are frequent visitors.

I was intrigued one day in summer 2004 when I noticed a small wasp-like insect repeatedly entering and exiting one of the tubes where the soil capping had been partially removed. Was this the culprit that opened up the tube? It was not carrying any material in or out so it may have just been inspecting the tube. I photographed it (see illustration) and sent a copy to Maggie and she showed it to a specialist, Robin Williams. He gave a suggested identification as *Ancistrocerus nigricornis*, a solitary wasp that does not parasitise bees but may use the tubes for its own nest, though he said that he would have needed to see the specimen to be quite positive with his identification.



*Ancistrocerus nigricornis*

to bring things more up to date. By July 2005 six of the remaining seven used tubes were still unopened and one was partly opened, showing an irregular hole in the capping. I am concerned that these may have failed as the mature bees should surely have emerged by July. In May several females were busy entering other tubes, and in April males were very active around the box, presumably waiting for females to emerge. There is, of course, a possibility that bees emerged from all the tubes and that tubes were rapidly re-used and re-sealed, but all the cappings look old and I am inclined to think that the pupae did not survive the 2004 winter.

Towards the end of May 2005 I spent some time watching a female *O. rufa* entering a tube. She went in head first, backed out, then turned round and reversed in, shortly to reappear and sit with her head just at the tube entrance before flying off. This behaviour was repeated several times in the same tube, possibly by the same individual, though I have had up to three females present together around the tube entrances. None of them appeared to be carrying anything and I wondered if they were just prospecting before making the decision to build cells. My concerns about how the bees were able to turn round inside such a small tube have been answered – obviously they don't need to. They just go in head first or tail first and have no problems reversing. It would be nice to think that each occasion resulted in an egg being laid, but I saw no signs of either mud or pollen being carried into the tubes.

I would appreciate advice on another piece of strange behaviour. Maybe other bee box

owners have had the same experience? Some outside agency started to pull the paper linings out of my tubes. I first noticed this in summer 2004 and was surprised that the linings were pulled out with some delicacy as they were undamaged and with care I was able to push them back into place. Then the cardboard tubes themselves were pulled out. I was finding maybe four or five protruding from two to five centimetres, not every day but quite frequently, and I had to push them back several times each week. I went on holiday to Scotland in late August 2004 and when I returned half of the tubes were lying on the ground beneath the box. I have considered all the possible suspects: house sparrows are active in this area of my garden as my feeders are close by; I have seen wood mice dashing about beneath my bird feeders, and I am plagued by grey squirrels. Any of these might have the ability to pull tubes out, and the mischievous temperament to go on doing it, even when there was no apparent food reward involved. It would be nice to have a clue, but each tube was pulled out cleanly with no obvious tooth or beak marks. I may have solved the problem by putting an elastic band around the tubes to hold them together, so it is now a case of "one out, all out". Can anybody suggest the identity of the culprit?
There is much to be learned from watching these boxes, and their inhabitants, but time is short and the garden has to be weeded, pruned and planted, and I feel guilty at not devoting more time to the bees. One never knows when a casual observation is going to provide new knowledge about the behaviour of our garden wildlife.

**Richard Iliffe**

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## Cottonwool Galls on Oak Catkins

[see:- LES Newsletter September 2004]

-the story continues....

Cottonwool galls are caused by the cynipid wasp *Andricus quercusramuli* [sexual generation], on oak catkins. Last year, following on from the emergence of 15 male and 14 female chalcid wasp parasitoids *Aulogymnus skianeuros*, from the cottonwool gall collected at Evington Arboretum on 12.06.2004, I put the gall back into the jamjar and kept checking it regularly. By the 17th September 2004, yet more chalcid wasps had emerged from the gall [8 males and 7 females, of a different species]. At the British Plant Gall Society Invertebrates Group meeting [Brocks Hill, Oadby, Leics., 10.04.2005], I showed the specimens to Robin Williams and he keyed them out to the chalcid wasp parasitoid *Cecidostiba fungosa* - and said that they were a new addition to the known list of inhabitants of cottonwool galls in Britain [although they are known on the Continent]. I put the gall back into the jam jar again just in case .....but nothing more has emerged since!

**Maggie Frankum**

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## Bumblebee behaviour

At lunchtime today in the garden [05.07.2005, dry, sunny, 18°C, strong breeze], I noticed a flurry of activity around the top of one of my mature dwarf conifers [Thuya]. Initially at a distance, I thought that it might be an active wasps nest but on closer inspection, it proved to be fast flying bumblebees whizzing around the top of the tree, coming and going on an erratic patrol. I netted the first 5 in quick succession and popped them into the fridge to slow them down a bit for identifiacation and release. They all proved to be male cuckoo bumblebees *Bombus vestalis* [pristine - newly emerged?]. I didn't have time to continue observations but there were probably 10 - 15 bumbles involved. Were they males patrolling in search of females? Or was the conifer producing some sort of chemical attractant [like cats:catmint]? I've never seen this kind of behaviour before.
It has been suggested by other BWARS members, that male bumblebees attract mates by leaving scent marks on a circuit of prominent spots and flying between these in a repeated loop. Trees are commonly used in these flight paths and it is also common for several males to be patrolling the same route. Other bumblebee species have been seen doing this. This activity continued for several days but with a diminishing number of individuals. The males also spend a lot of time foraging on the marjoram flowers.

**Maggie Frankum**

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## Adonis Ladybird (*Adonia variegata*) attracted to light.

On the 9th August 2005 Adrian Russell was light trapping for moths at Ketton (SK 9706). During the session he took at least 2 Adonis Ladybirds. These are rare at light, the Orange

Ladybird (*Halyzia 16-guttata*) being the species most often encountered.
Look out for the Adonis, and any other species of ladybird, when you are light trapping.
Whilst talking about ladybirds, keep a look out for the Harlequin Ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*). This alien species is spreading rapidly across the country and, although larger than most other species of ladybird (5-8mm), it is highly polymorphic and so may be confused with other species. For a full account of this species ecology see (Roy *et al.* 2005).
Note that Peter Brown will be talking to us about Ladybirds on the 2nd February 2006.

Roy, H., Rowland, F., Brown, P., Ware, R. & Majerus, M. (2005). Ecology of the Harlequin Ladybird. *British Wildlife* **16**(6), 403-407.

**Frank Clark (Ed.)**

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## Book Reviews

A Photographic Guide to the Shieldbugs and Squashbugs of the British Isles.
M. Evans & R. Edmondson
Published by WGUK 2005 @ £16.20.
ISBN 0-9549506-0-7.

At last a guide to the British Shield and Squashbugs that illustrates all of the British species and is user friendly in the field. The Frederick Warne 'Land and Water bugs of the British Isles' was really the only aide to identifying members of these two groups but in recent years it has been hard to obtain and expensive and, in addition, not an easy book to use in the field.
I have used A Photographic Guide etc. on a number of occasions during the summer and have found it easy to use. Recommended.

**Frank Clark (Ed.).**

Complete British Insects
Michael Chinery
Collins 2005
ISBN 0-00-717966-9
£16.99
A somewhat ambitious title since only around 6% of the 20,000 or so British species is covered. It is essentially a photographic guide with no keys. There is, in my view, an imbalance in the coverage of some orders. For example, approximately 656 species of the Lepidoptera are illustrated whereas only 137 are covered in the Coleoptera. In Britain there are approximately 2500 and 4000 species in these two orders respectively. Each photograph is accompanied by a short piece of text describing the insect, where it is likely to be found etc. This is useful although on page74 having illustrated and named the Scarce and Four-spotted chasers it then refers to them in the text as darters.
The photographs are, on the whole, very good and should enable an identification to be made. However, as with any book that relies on illustrations with no keys proceed with caution.

**Frank Clark (Ed.)**

Field Guide to the Bumblebees of Great Britain & Ireland.
Mike Edwards & Martin Jenner
Countryside and Garden Conservation Series
Ocelli Ltd. ISBN 0-9549713-0-2

Size and price:- The idea of having a modestly-priced book about bumblebee identification [illustrated with colour photographs], that is small enough to be slipped into your pocket and taken out into the field, is something that I wish had been available ten years ago, when I first became interested in the different bumblebees that foraged and nested in my garden.
Does the book work? This little book is intended to help people identify most of the bumblebees that they come across in the garden or out in the field. This is achieved by comparing a bumblebee that you've found on a flower [or a temporarily captured specimen] with the Quick Identification Chart [takes some finding on pages 40/41, when you are in a hurry], matching the general colour pattern of the coat hairs to the thorax and abdomen icons, thus indicating which species it might be [the perception of different colours may vary from person to person!]
[a "go to" page reference number would be useful here and speed up the search process - bumbles won't wait around while you flip pages!]. Alternatively, it is possible to thumb through the species pages at random and search for a match amongst the photographs of male and female bumblebees and the associated notes. However, the information gathered from both routes is more likely to produce more of the necessary information that helps you arrive at an identification. The book obviously works better with practise - the more you look, the more the jizz becomes familiar and you should be able to sort out the regular visitors to the garden. You'll be very privileged if you see one of the rarer species, so in the first instance, just concentrate on identifying the common bumblebee species found in VC 55.
Are there any problems? It's best to start identifying bumblebees in spring when all you have to deal with are the queens and similar marked workers. A knowledge of flower shapes [tubular/open] and the bumblebees that you

see foraging on them, will offer clues to long-tongued or short-tongued species [confirmed in the species notes]. Later on in the summer, the new males add to the steep learning curve, with their variable coat patterns and different facial hair colours. There can be confusion when the regular coat pattern of a species in your garden, just happens to be one of the "variable" colour forms [with no photograph to look at in the book]. Although the melanic, mostly male cuckoo bumbles are mentioned, positive identification of these usually requires a prepared specimen so that the genitalia can be compared to photographs on pages 97 - 100. In late summer, identification can also be tricky when hair colours are bleached and faded; or just worn away, letting the cuticle shine through. It's a case of the more you know the less you know but armed with this little book in your pocket and a lot of perseverance, you'll find it an enjoyable learning process. If you want to find out even more about bumblebees, there's a good "further reading" list at the back of the book.

**Maggie Frankum**

I purchased this book at the start of summer with the intension of getting to grips with the common species of bumblebee in my garden. I found the book a little awkward to use at first mostly for the reasons Maggie has given above. However, with practise I was pretty confident that my identifications were correct. *The main difficulty I found was that later in the* summer the banding on the bees appears to be less distinct and identification therefore more difficult. Although I found the book very useful it would have been nice to have a tame expert at my elbow.

**Frank Clark**

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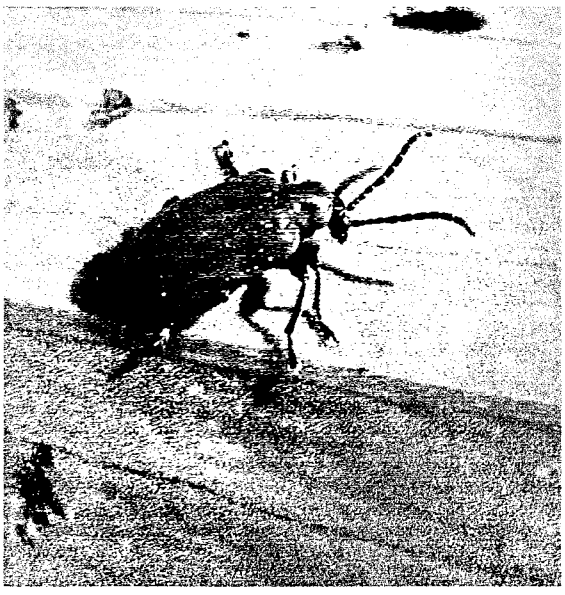
## The Lily Beetle (*Lilioceris lilii* (Scopoli)) (Chrysomelidae:Criocerinae)

*Lilioceris lilii* originates from Eurasia and was first recorded in Britain in 1839 (Stephens 1839) although he misidentified it as *Crioceris merigera*. However, from his description of this beetle it is certain that it was *L. lilii* (Cox 2001). It would appear that it was introduced into Britain on imported lily bulbs. It remained a rare beetle in Britain and from the1940s to the 1970s was restricted to 5 Vice Counties in Central and Southern England. Since 1980 it has undergone a rapid expansion in its range and has more recently been recorded in Scotland (Sutcliffe 2002).

The reason for this expansion is unclear. Global warming has of course been put forward as a possible explanation. Adults of this species over-winter in leaf litter therefore a greater over-winter survival would lead to more eggs being laid in the next Spring. *Linoceris lilii* feeds on species of *Lilium* and its hybrids, *Fritilaria* spp and *Polygonatum* spp. Are these more popular in gardens now than in the past? Certainly with the enormous increase in the number of garden centres one can easily imagine that the spread of *L. lilii* around Britain has been facilitated by the hand of man rather than by their own power. But, as with most things in nature, it is likely to be a combination of factors. For a full account of the status of the Lily Beetle in Britain see Cox (*op cit.*).
The adult beetle is a handsome beast measuring 6-8mm with bright red elytra and pronotum and with a black head. The adults, after over-winter in leaf litter, start to feed as soon as the first leaves appear. The larvae cover themselves with a layer of mucilaginous faecal material derived from a dorsally situated anal opening. Six adult *L. lilii* were given to me in August 2005 from a garden in Oadby (SP 618998) where they were feeding on the Oriental Fragrant Lily (*Lilium* 'Stargazer').
The Lily Beetle is a pest and its' spread is being monitored by the Royal Horticultural Society, Wisley. Look out for adults between March and August and send your records to advisory_entomology@rhs.org.uk giving a 6 figure grid reference or post code.



*Lilioceris lilii*

References

Cox,M.L. (2001). The status of the Lily Beetle *Lilioceris lilii* (Scopoli, 1793) in Britain (Chrysomelidae: Criocerinae). *The Coleopterist* **10**(1), 5-20.

Stepens, J.F. (1839). *A Manual of British Coleoptera or beetles*. London: Longman, Orme Brown, Green and Longmans. 284.

Sutcliffe, R., (2002). Lily Beetle in Glasgow. *The Glasgow Naturalist* **24**(1), 101.

**Frank Clark**

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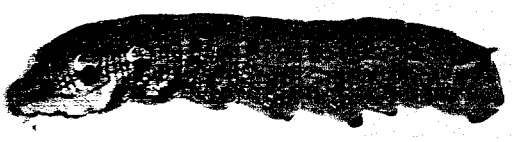
## Coming from a tap near you

On September 2nd the Leicester Mercury contacted me about reports of 'worms' exiting from the water supply via household taps. Could I tell them anything about the 'worms' and why was it happening? I informed them that they were not 'worms' but the larvae of non-biting midges belonging to the dipteran family Chironomidae. I suggested that they probably enter the water supply system from an open tank where the adult midges lay their eggs (Front page Leicester Mercury September 3rd.)

In a follow-up article, again on the front page of the Leicester Mercury, on the 5th September they showed a nice photograph of culicine mosquito larvae purported to be from a tap water in Dane Hills, again referring to them as 'worms'. These are somewhat unusual in water mains since they require a water/air interface in order to siphon air to breath, unlike chironomid larvae which possess gills.

Several hundred complaints were received by Severn Trent who eventually traced the source to a tank in the Melbourne water treatment works. Several days of flushing the system appears to have removed the offending beasties.

On the 7th September I was again contacted by the Leicester Mercury, this time it was alien invaders. These turned out to be Elephant hawkmoth (*Deilephila elpenor*) caterpillars. Insects occasionally make the news, usually for the wrong reasons, but I suppose if they are always referred to as worms the publicity probably does not do much harm to their image.



Elephant Hawkmoth larva

**Frank Clark**

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## A NOTE FROM THE TREASURER.

TO ALL MEMBERS MAY I THANK EACH AND EVERYONE OF YOU FOR PAYING YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS PROMPTLY.

IT MAKES MY JOB AS TREASURER A LOT EASIER.

ALSO PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE YOUR TWO ANNUAL NEWSLETTERS SPRING AND AUTUMN. THE REASON BEING OUT OF SIXTY NEWSLETTERS SENT TWICE A YEAR TWO OR THREE ALWAYS GO MISSING IN THE POST.

FOR MOST MEMBERS, ESPECIALLY OUT OF COUNTY MEMBERS, NEWSLETTERS ARE OUR ONLY COMMUNICATION.

NEXT AN APPEAL, IF YOU HAVE ANY ARTICLES, PIECES, OBSERVATIONS OR PHOTOGRAPHS (THEY DO NOT HAVE TO BE INDEPTH) PLEASE SEND THEM TO OUR NEWSLETTER EDITOR FRANK CLARK ( E – MAIL OR POST ) ADDRESS INSIDE COVER OF NEWSLETTER.

THEY ARE ALWAYS MOST WELCOME.

FINALLY TO OUR WINTER INDOOR MEETINGS AT HOLY HAYES. EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO COME ALONG.THREE PREVIOUS MEETINGS ECTOPARASITIC INSECTS BY FRANK CLARK, MOTHS OF RUTLAND BY ADRIAN RUSSEL AND DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES BY IAN MERRELL ALL EXCELLENT TALKS AND SLIDE SHOWS. OUR NEXT WINTER PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS WILL BE PRINTED ON THE BACK COVER OF NEWSLETTER NO. 33.

PLEASE COME ALONG TO AS MANY AS YOU CAN .

**STUART POOLE**
**L E S TREASURER.**

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## OBITUARY

IT IS WITH GREAT SADNESS THAT WE INFORM YOU OF THE DEATH OF THOMAS ROBERTSON, WHO DIED ON THE 21st JUNE 2004.

A MEMBER OF LES SINCE 1993, HIS INTERESTS WERE GENERAL NATURAL HISTORY WITH BUTTERFLIES AND WILDFLOWERS BEING FOREMOST.

OUR CONDOLENCES TO HIS WIFE AND FAMILY.

**STUART POOLE**
**L E S TREASURER**

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All indoor meetings are held at Holly Hayes, 216 Birstall Road, Birstall, meetings at 7.00pm for a 7.30 start. Exhibits are always welcomed and refreshments are included.

**2005**

| | |
|---|---|
| Thursday 20th October | Members Evening. |
| Thursday 17th November | Frank Clark. Ticks and Lyme Disease. What every field worker should know about. |
| Thursday 8th December | Derek Lott. Wetland Beetles. |

**2006**

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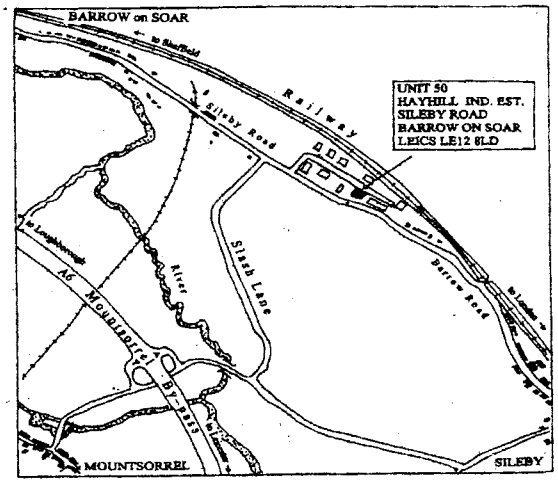
|---|---|
| Thursday 5th January | AGM and Reserves update. |
| Thursday 2nd February | Peter Brown. Ladybirds. |
| Thursday 2nd March | Helen Gregory. Biodiversity and the Countryside. |
| Thursday 6th April | Barrow workshop evening |

Below is a map of how to get to The Collection Resources Centre, Barrow on Soar, grid ref. SK593163.




| **Looking for advice or information?** The following are willing to act as an initial point of contact for providing advice and information to members. As you will see, this list is far from complete - If you think you can help, please let us know. | |
|---|---|
| Coleoptera | Derek Lott, 5 Welland Rd, Barrow upon Soar, Loughborough, Leics LE12 8NA<br>Telephone: 01509 412876 Email: derek@lott.fsnet.co.uk |
| Diptera | John Kramer, 31 Ash Tree Road, Oadby, Leicester LE2 5TE<br>Telephone: 0116 271 6499 Email: j.kramer@tiscali.co.uk |
| Hymentoptera (Bees) | Maggie Frankum, 3 Chapel Lane, Knighton, Leicester LE2 3WF<br>Telephone: 0116 270 5833 Email: royfrankum@tiscali.co.uk |
| Lepidoptera | Adrian Russell, 15 St. Swithin's Road, Leicester LE5 2GE<br>Telephone: 0116 241 5101 Email: adrian@wainscot.demon.co.uk |
| Biological Recording (and other orders) | Darwyn Sumner, Holly Hayes, 216 Birstall Road, Birstall, Leicester LE4 4DG<br>Telephone: 0116 267 1950 Email: dsumner@leics.gov.uk |