



## WILDLIFE REPORT No. 23

October 2017 – March 2018



**TOP – CONVULVULUS HAWK MOTH**  
**BOTTOM – GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER**

## Introduction

The period October to March is usually the quiet part of the year. Especially if spring is delayed by repeated cold weather being fed over the UK from the east. Despite this we are pleased to get very rare migrant moths visiting us and a glimpse of a Sparrow Hawk having a wash and brush up. Planting trees and putting up nest boxes will further enhance the site for local wildlife.

## Moths

In most years there are immigrant moths that fly over from the European continent. Usually all sightings are in late summer and autumn. These arrivals attract general media attention as the insects are often the large hawk moths. I have reprinted a screen grab here from the Daily Mirror but I could just as easily found similar articles from all the national papers and several regional ones instead. These articles include words like "invasion" however the numbers involved are tiny in reality and you will be lucky if you ever see these long distance migrants. This autumn one of these moths made it to the nursery; the *Convolvulus Hawk-moth*. This moth was caught on the 8th of October and it is big insect with a wing span of around 10cm. Our individual was probably a second generation insect that hatched out in Europe, its parents having flown to Europe from North Africa. The captured insect is in very good condition which suggests that it was young and had not flown very far, possibly it had crossed the English Channel only recently. The picture of our moth sitting on the generator room floor gives shows its wings to be almost free of any damage. There is just a barely visible nick on the left forewing. The lens cover gives some sense of scale. The large moths tend to be very trusting and provided they are handled carefully will happily sit on a hand for a photograph. There is no risk from handling them, they will not bite or sting. It is far more likely that it is the handler that injures the moth. To give the moth the best chance of continuing its journey after being photographed it was placed on the trunk of a birch tree. It will have sat there, probably all day, relying on keeping still and letting its cryptic colouration protect it from predation. Sussex Moths collects all the moth data for this area. Their data set for this species is just over 100 individual sightings reported over the last 40 years. So this is a rare moth and hardly qualifies as "an invasion". We are very fortunate to have seen this moth on the nursery.





The moth trap was set a total eight times in the last three months of 2017 and although the Convolvulus Hawk Moth was the undoubted highlight we caught a range of moths. Most of them were ordinary and have been caught many times on our nursery. However as often occurs, there were species among them that are of conservation interest; the Dusky Thorn and Sallow are both on the Sussex BAP list. The first three months of 2018 have been a poor period for moths on the site. Of the seven occasions when the trap was set there were no moths caught on five of them. A total of just four moths was caught on the other two occasions. This winter has been colder than the average; especially march when there is often a period of warm weather. This probably accounts for why so few moths have been found. Given the small numbers caught at the beginning of 2018 it was very good to find the moth pictured here. This is the Oak Beauty moth which when it is fresh like this one is very well marked. The pattern provides a very good camouflage when it is sitting on a lichen covered tree branch. This moth is fairly common in the south of England where the caterpillars' feed on a range of trees, not just oak. This species has a wide range across Europe but is most common in England. Perhaps that means that the UK has extra responsibility for this moth species?

10.09.2017	24.09.2017		08.10.2017	05.11.2017		
L. Yellow Underwing 5	L. Yellow Underwing 15	The Snout 1	L. Yellow Underwing 2	November Moth 3		
S. Hebrew Character 3	Dusky Thorn 6	Burnished Brass 1	S. Hebrew Character 2	Straw Dot 2		
Square Spot Rustic 3	S. Hebrew Character 6	Frosted Orange 1	Canary S. Thorn 1	Red Green 1		
Dusky Thorn 1	Canary S. Thorn 3	Orange Riband 1	Straw Dot 1			
Common Quaker 1	Lunar Underwing 3	Swallow Tail 1	c. Marbled Carpet 1			
	Sallow 2	Angle Shades 1	Convolvulus Hawk Moth 1	19.11.2017		
	Silver Y 2	Brimstone 1		Grey Sh'der 1		
	Common Carpet 1	Garden Carpet 1				
	Black Rustic 1	Willow Beauty 1	21.10.2017		02.12.2017	
	Orange Sallow 1	Gold Spot 1	Beaded Chestnut 1			
				02.12.2017		



## Birds

The bird survey data is on the following page. In 2017 we have seen the greatest number of species recorded in a year, a total of 46. There has though been no new species seen so our species count remains on 55. 2018 starts with a total of 33 species for the first three months a bit of a low score but there is nine months to go and all the summer migrants have yet to appear. Our feeding stations remain as popular as ever, the picture on the left shows a Dunnock on one of the two fat ball feeders. A consistent approach to putting out food means there is almost always some activity at the feeding station.









## The Big Farmland Bird Count. (organised by GWCT)



The nursery has participated in this survey for five years. LEAF encourages it's members to engage with this survey and it is not too demanding and sometimes turns up surprises. It is a count lasting for half an hour in

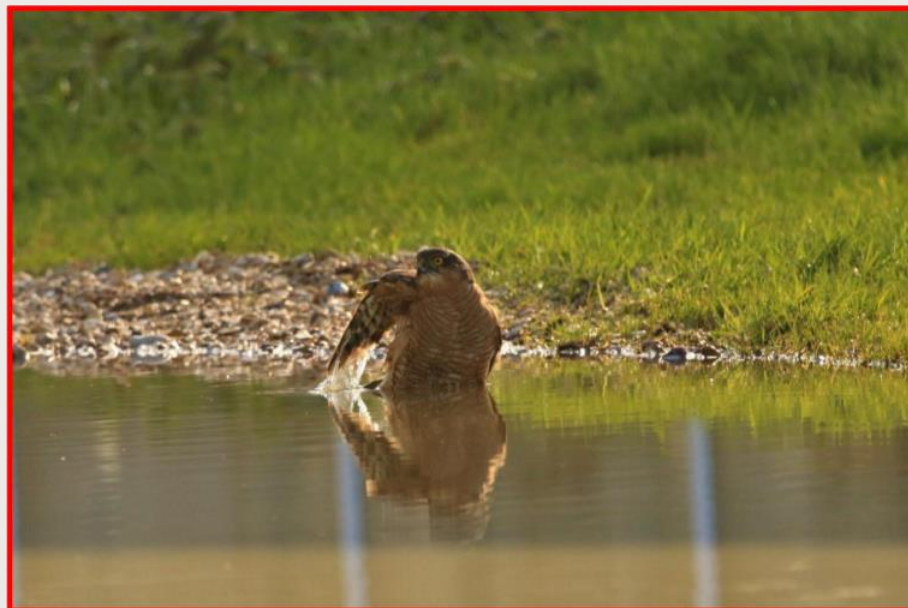
mid February. We have always done the count on a weekend morning with most of the time being spent in the vicinity of the bird feeding station. This year was not our best year for numbers of birds; instead it matched the biggest number of species. The stand out bird for this



survey was a sparrow hawk found having an early morning bath in the puddles on the track to glasshouse 14-17. At the other end of the spectrum is the Chaffinch which is the most numerous of the birds on this survey.

They are amongst the most frequent users of the bird feeders; they are usually on the feeders or watching them from the safety of the bushes.

FARMLAND BIRD SURVEY					
SPECIES	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
BLACK BIRD	2	2	3	3	1
BLACK HEADED GULL	0	5	0	2	0
BLUE TIT	0	1	3	1	1
CARRION CROW	3	0	2	3	0
CHAFFINCH	0	6	6	10	8
CHIFF CHAFF	0	2	0	0	0
COLLARED DOVE	0	0	1	0	0
DUNNOCK	1	3	3	2	2
GOLD FINCH	0	5	8	9	3
GREAT TIT	1	1	2	1	2
GREEN FINCH	0	3	3	3	2
GREEN WOODPECKER	1	0	0	0	1
GREY WAGTAIL	1	0	0	0	0
HERRING GULL	1	4	0	2	2
HOUSE SPARROW	0	0	1	3	2
JAY	0	1	0	0	0
LONG TAILED TIT	0	2	1	0	2
MAGPIE	1	0	0	3	2
PIED WAGTAIL	1	0	0	0	0
ROBIN	1	2	2	1	2
SISKIN	0	0	1	0	0
SONG THRUSH	1	2	0	0	0
SPARROWHAWK	0	0	0	0	1
WOOD PIGEON	5	5	3	3	6
WREN	1	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL SPECIES</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>TOTAL INDIVIDUALS</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>37</b>



## Three nest boxes

Three more nest boxes got put up this year. Two for hole nesting birds and one open fronted box. All three are located on trees that were planted to minimise the visual impact of glasshouse 10-17. The trees are now big enough to be able to host these boxes



## Tree planting

This winter we have planted out over 100 trees in suitable places on the nursery. All of these plantings are on the north side of the glasshouses where they will not shade our crops. The first picture shows young hazel saplings behind their rabbit guards. These hazels have all been moved here from where they happened to have grown from seed in other places around the site. There are in total thirteen of them. It is envisaged that they will



form a useful shelter belt along the south edge of this field. Hazel which grows well here is a good plant for early emerging bees which visit the catkins, and then later on the nuts provide another food resource. The second picture is a double row of Guelder Rose. This is a low growing shrub more than a tree. In time this will be providing a big berry resource. The berries are very popular with birds in the autumn. We hope that by planting this rather weak growing shrub in isolation it will not get crowded out, like it tends to be in the mixed species boundary hedgerow. There are fifty of these in a double line along part of the north side of glasshouse 14-17. A further fifty hawthorn trees (not pictured) have also been planted near here with the aim of providing some shelter from the wind across the eastern part of this area. Next winter is hoped to extend this planting line with Spindle which is another plant that birds like to feed on in the autumn.

