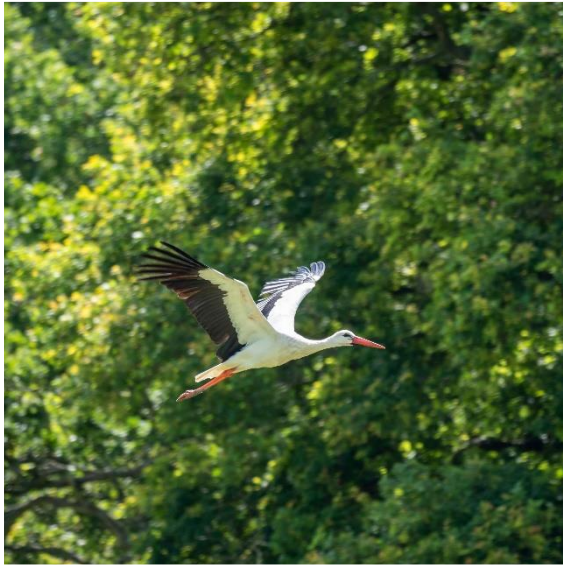


Tour Report

UK – Butterflies & Birds of Sussex

29 June – 1 July 2021

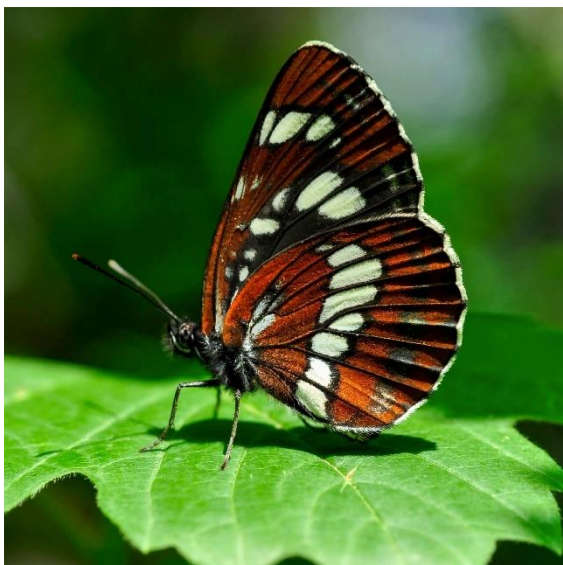
White stork



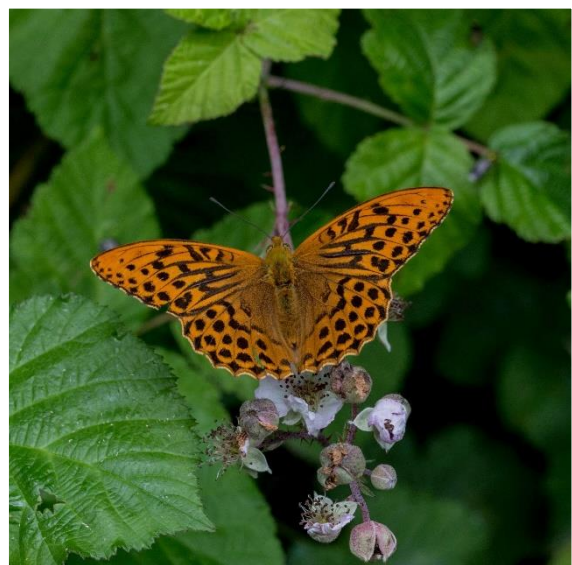
Corn bunting



White admiral



Silver washed fritillary



Compiled by Terry Goble

This was a relaxed and thoroughly enjoyable exploration of some of the diverse Sussex wildlife sites. We visited chalk downlands, lowland heathland and of course the 're-wilding' project at the Knepp estate. Highlights were the orchid and fritillary festooned slopes of the South Downs and watching the storks and a turtle dove at Knepp. I hope that the guests enjoyed the outings as much as I did!

Day 1: Tuesday 29 July 2021

The group met at 3pm at the Tollgate Hotel and after introductions we set off for a drive to the Knepp Estate. It was a grey afternoon and we had intermittent light showers, however, we had a beautiful 're-wild' landscape to explore. We decided to walk the White Trail, as it gives a good cross section of the mosaic of habitats at Knepp.

After joining the trail we came across one of the seven white stork nests that can now be found here, after a successful reintroduction scheme. This nest had three large almost fully grown juvenile storks and two hard working parents keeping them fed with a variety of small mammals, reptiles and insects. The most obvious difference was the coral red bills of the adults compared to the black stubby bills of the young birds.

We watched them for a little while before continuing around the trail. We paused to look at a banded demoiselle at a small stream and briefly checked for the little owl, which we were unable to find on this occasion. Continuing on we heard and had restricted views of at least one green woodpecker in an oak standard. We then moved off the white trail to look at the 'slingshot' fencing for the beaver introduction program and explore the lake the beavers will be introduced to. There were a number of small blue damselflies hovering between the grass and the brambles. When they were still we were able to identify common blue and blue tailed damselflies. Out on the lake a pair of great crested grebes with their 'humbug' chicks were a delight to watch. There were also greylag geese and chicks on the bank and mute swans, gliding effortlessly over the lake. We watched the barn swallows skimming insects off the top of the water and coots and moorhens deep into the vegetation.

We made our way back onto the white trail and came across the Tamworth pigs, which had been introduced as a substitute for wild boar. We could see the evidence of their work as they tilled the grass fields, creating disturbed patches for wildflowers to grow adding to the diversity of the region. A little further on we spotted a herd of fallow deer, their antlers still velvet. These had been introduced to browse the vegetation, keeping areas clear and open. As we walked on a kestrel and then a powerful peregrine were seen carrying some unfortunate prey to what was probably a nest in the mature oaks. A great spotted woodpecker added to our bird tally.

There seemed to be many storks on the wing and we were occasionally treated to the sight of these large birds gliding overhead and we watched a couple feeding in a grassy field. The light showers began to get a little heavier and we paused to put on our rain gear, before setting off. Just before the rain arrived a distant turtle dove was heard but fell silent in the wet conditions. We crossed an open field and walked past the oak trees and accompanying sallows that now hold one of the biggest populations of purple emperors. However, we were here maybe a fraction early and they will probably emerge over the next few days.

We were now on the home straight as thoughts turned to returning to the hotel for dinner. The rain had eased and we were about to turn out of the field when a familiar 'purring' was heard. A quick scan of the tall oaks revealed a turtle dove! It was a little distant but we had good 'scope views. This was a bird that many wanted to see so it was nice to have struck lucky. We left the turtle dove and moved on around the trail. We passed a few Dartmoor ponies and fallow deer on our way out, which are all part of the management of the Knepp Estate and promoting diversity.

On the drive back the persistent rain became heavier and probably put an end to our chances of seeing a little owl. We checked out the breeding site, but there were no owls visible. Although a rabbit sitting on the wall was a little unusual, this apparently is something they do... who knew!

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We drove back to the hotel in time to get ready for dinner at 7:30pm. We all met in the restaurant and it was a lovely relaxed and chatty atmosphere. A check on the weather showed that it was still lightly raining, and it was decided that an evening stroll was probably not going to be very productive. So we called it a day and after an enjoyable meal together we bade each other goodnight.

Day 2: Wednesday 30 July 2021

We all met up at 8:00am. Unfortunately, the overnight rain had meant that there were only a few common moths in the trap. Instead we went for a walk around a wildflower meadow and even indulged in a little pond dipping, not quite with jam jars but it did feel nostalgic. Around the garden under refugia we found large and probably pregnant slow worms, under another a field mouse and later a nest of bank voles with developing babies inside. The pond dipping produced a few smooth newt tadpoles, emperor dragonfly nymph, broad-bodied chaser nymph, damselfly nymph and a common froglet. Notable birds included corn buntings and skylarks.

The morning had been cool and overcast and we hoped it would get brighter as the day wore on. We stopped enroute to Southwater Woods to grab some lunch and for a convenience stop. We then drove on for about thirty minutes to Magdaland Woods, part of the Southwater Woods complex. Unfortunately the weather remained stubbornly cool and damp. The rain along with horse prints had caused the track to become very muddy in parts. We persevered looking at whatever creatures we could find that had braved the weather, spotting a few meadow browns and azure damselflies before we came across an idyllic woodland cottage complete with a lily pad pond. There were a pair of great spotted woodpeckers sharing the garden and a distant green woodpecker could be heard 'yaffling'. We consoled ourselves with the fact that it had been a lovely walk through a semi-ancient woodland and began our return walk to the car. However, as we were a few hundred meters from the car a burst of sunshine brought the woods to life. Within a few minutes we saw white admiral, silver-washed fritillary and a large hoverfly (volucella). We managed to see the main target species and get good views of them, it felt like a just reward for our efforts.

We then drove to Pulborough Brooks, a local RSPB reserve, for a lunch stop and walk. After walking to the garden and settling down for lunch we were approached by a warden, who heard us asking about adders (common at this reserve). She very kindly offered to talk us on a 'private' tour of the reptile reserve, which is usually off limits, a rare treat. She took us to a bank behind a gate and took us to some refugia. As we approached we saw a female adder coiled in the short grass. She quickly slipped away as we approached. There was another female adder near the refugia, which also bid a hasty retreat. Under the bitumen refugia there were two snakes, a melanistic male adder and a glassy eyed grass snake side-by-side. The grass snake was sloughing its skin and was temporarily blind. It was a pleasure to see them and we thanked the warden and returned to our lunch, noting a migrant hawkler enroute.

After lunch we walked through the reserve to the Winpenny hide. Here we had great views of avocets and their adorable chicks and also lapwings and redshanks with chicks. It had turned into a nursery pool full of squabbling adults and cute chicks. Once the rain had abated, we made our way back to the entrance pausing to admire a moorhen with even more babies. We finally managed to drag ourselves away and headed off to The Burgh.

We parked up at The Burgh and took a circular walk around the farmland. The hedgerows and fields had grown considerably, so finding partridges was tricky. We did however manage to see a small covey of four grey partridge, an increasingly rare sight. There were also many red-legged partridge around. We also saw a few raptors as red kites glided over and buzzards soared. We were also on the lookout for brown hare, which are relatively common on this farmland. Amongst the many rabbits we did pick out one likely candidate, but the distance and its refusal to move from its lying position made identification uncertain. The evening was finally brightening up and we headed back to the hotel for an early dinner.

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The service at dinner was swift, which was helpful as we were keen to get underway on our trip to Iping Common. We enjoyed the dinner in a relaxed and lighthearted atmosphere. We then set off on the 45-minute drive to Iping. We made good time and were on the ridge by about 9pm. We waited, listening out for the strange churring sounds. The light began to fade as we heard our first intermittent churring. As it became darker the churring seemed to come from every corner of the reserve and sounded close. Unfortunately, they stubbornly declined to fly and remained hidden in the dense heather. We decided it was time to head back and set off with the churring still surrounding us. As we were leaving our luck changed and the familiar stiff winged silhouette of a nightjar drifted by and we had at least some views of the nightjar after all our patience. The drive back was largely uneventful, but a tawny owl flew quickly over the top of the car and a few foxes were seen by the roadside. We returned to the hotel and said a rather sleepy goodnight after a long and enjoyable day.

Day 3: Thursday 1 July 2021

The morning was much brighter and a sea fret that threatened to sit over us was quickly burnt off by the emerging sun. The moth trap had been more productive and we found a peppered moth (famed for the study on its evolving colour in response to pollution), a privet hawk moth, with its candy striped body and our second largest moth. There was also the inevitable noctuides with many heart and dark arches.

We then drove to Ditchling Common to look for the bee orchid. After admiring the small colony of orchids we had a brief look for the black hairstreak. We were on the edge of their flight period and after a thirty minute wait there was no sign of them. There were however a few silver washed fritillaries on the wing, which were nice to see although they were frenetic and not stopping to be admired. We then quickly dropped in at a supermarket to buy lunch and use the facilities.

We then continued our journey up to Castle Hill, passing the magnificent Amex stadium, home of proper football. We parked up and walked for 30 minutes along a good track. We had glimpses of fly-by fritillaries and red admirals, but not much was stopping. The afternoon was now becoming very warm as we approached the reserve. We got to enjoy the reserve in glorious sunshine, which is the perfect backdrop to the array of butterflies and wildflowers on display in the beautiful example of downland. As we walked through the purple heads of knapweeds and thistles all seemed to host a marble white or dark green fritillary. Orchids spiked out of the grasslands among many wildflowers, rest harrow, agrimony, viper's bugloss among many others that were a feast for the eyes and noses as scents rose from fragrant orchids, wild thyme and many other plants. Although with the beauty there is always a beast and we watched fascinated as a crab spider lurking on an ox-eyed daisy snatched a fly and scurried under the petals to devour its meal. Buzzards mewing overhead, corn buntings jangling and a chipping stone chat all added to the spectacle of this superb reserve.

It was now time to head back and return to the hotel. We said goodbye to two of the group as they had followed in their own car. The rest drove back to the hotel and said our warm goodbyes before heading off and the tour coming to an end.

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Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
	BIRDS	<i>AVES</i>			
1	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus color</i>	✓	✓	
2	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓		
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
4	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	
5	Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
6	Grey partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		✓	
7	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓		
8	Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓
9	Wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
10	European turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	✓		
11	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓
12	European nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		✓	
13	Common swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓
14	Common cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓	
15	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	
16	Common coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	
17	European white stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓		
18	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	
19	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		
20	Pied avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓	
21	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	
22	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	
23	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓

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24	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓
25	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
26	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	
27	Eurasian buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
28	Tawny owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		✓	
29	Green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	✓	
30	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	
31	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
32	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinu</i>	✓	✓	
33	Eurasian jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓
34	Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
35	Eurasian jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
36	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
37	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
38	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓
39	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓
40	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	
41	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
42	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓		
43	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓
44	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
45	Corn bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓
46	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
47	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
48	Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓
49	Northern house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	
50	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓
51	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	H	H	✓

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52	Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓
53	Garden warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			✓
54	Common whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	✓	✓	✓
55	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
56	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
57	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
58	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			✓
59	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓
60	Eurasian blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	BUTTERFLIES	RHOPALOCERA			
1	Comma	<i>Polyommatus c-album</i>			✓
2	Common blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓	✓
3	Dark green fritillary	<i>Argynnis aglaja</i>			
4	Green-veined white	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓	✓
5	Large skipper	<i>Ochlodes venata</i>		✓	✓
6	Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓	
7	Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓	✓	✓
8	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>			C
9	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	✓	✓
10	Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>		✓	✓
11	Silver-washed fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>		✓	
12	Small blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>			✓
13	Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>			✓
14	Small heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓	✓
15	Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>			✓
16	Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓	✓
17	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓	✓
18	White admiral	<i>Satyrrium w-album</i>		✓	

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	MOTHS (MACROS)	LEPIDOPTERA			
	GEOMETRID				
1	Yellow shell	<i>Camptogramma bilineata bilineata</i>		✓	✓
2	Peppered moth	<i>Biston betularia</i>			✓
3	Privet hawkmoth	<i>Sphinx ligustri</i>	✓	✓	
4	Small elephant hawkmoth	<i>Deilephila porcellus</i>		✓	✓
5	Six-spot burnet	<i>Zygaena filipendulae stephensi</i>			✓
6	Cinnabar	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>	✓	✓	
	NOCTUIDAE				
1	Heart and dart	<i>Agrotis exclamatoris</i>		✓	
2	Dark arches	<i>Apamea monoglypha</i>		✓	
3	Silver 'Y'	<i>Autographa gamma</i>		✓	
	MOTHS (MICROS)				
1	Grass veneer	<i>Crambus sp</i>	✓	✓	✓
2	Nettle-tap	<i>Anthophila fabriciana</i>			✓
	DRAGONFLIES	ANISOPTERA			
1	Banded demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>	✓		
2	Azure damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	✓	✓	✓
3	Common blue damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	✓		
4	Blue-tailed damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>		✓	✓
5	Emperor dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>		N	
6	Southern hawk	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>		✓	
7	Broad-bodied chaser	<i>Libellula spona</i>		N	
	MAMMALS	MAMMILIA			
1	Wood mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>		✓	
2	Bank vole (pups)	<i>Myodfes glareolus</i>		✓	
3	European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓		

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4	Fallow deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓	✓	
5	Red fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓	
	REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS	REPTILIA AND AMPHIBIA			
1	Slow worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>		✓	✓
2	Grass snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>		✓	
3	European adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>		✓	
4	Common frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>		✓	
5	Smooth newt	<i>Lissotriton vulgaris</i>		T	
	PLANTS	PLANTAE			
1	Ragged robin	<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>	✓		
2	Round headed rampion	<i>Phyteuma orbiculare</i>			✓
3	Devil's bit scabious	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>		✓	✓
4	Self heal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
5	Common knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	✓	✓	✓
6	Common ragwort	<i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>	✓		✓
7	Rough hawkbit	<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	✓	✓	✓
8	Bird's foot trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	✓		✓
9	Horseshoe vetch	<i>Hippocrepis comosa</i>			✓
10	Kidney vetch	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>			✓
11	Ladies bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>	✓		✓
12	Scarlet pimpernel	<i>Lysimachia arvensis</i>	✓		✓
13	Common restharrow	<i>Ononis repens</i>			✓
14	Viper's bugloss	<i>Echium vulgare</i>			✓
15	Agrimony	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>			✓
16	Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	✓	✓	✓
17	Meadow sweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>			✓
18	Common spotted orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>			✓

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19	Pyramidal orchid	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>		✓	✓
20	Fragrant orchid	<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>			✓
21	Bee orchid	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>			✓

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