



NEWSLETTER

Issue 36

Summer 2010

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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15 April 2010

Worth Matravers, Purbeck, Dorset

Leaders: Dave Green and Sharon Pilkington

A most memorable excursion led by Dave Green and Sharon Pilkington which repeated the first expedition in 1993 of the newly-formed Society. Twenty of us set out from the village in brilliant sunshine; on the village green with its pond and white ducks Dave quickly spotted unexpected rosettes of Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) growing in the short turf. We continued south to the sea at Winspit and the amazing quarried caves there; the Portland stone beds are horizontal here and for safe extraction, stone columns are left to support the "roof". It was nearby that a basking adder was spotted and the first of the day's real quarry – the Early Spider Orchids (*Orchis sphegodes*). Only one or two florets were fully open due to this year's exceptionally late spring. I last saw this lovely orchid fifty years ago a little further west along the cliffs, and we saw many more, mostly not open, later on our walk



Quarried cave - Richard Aisbitt

Portland stone beds are horizontal here and for safe extraction, stone columns are left to support the "roof"

eastwards. They have also been seen still further east by Leif Bersweden at the Durlston Country Park. In sheltered crevices we found both Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium Adiantum-nigrum*) and Sea Spleenwort (*A. marinum*).

Several times on our walk huge oil beetles (*Meloe proscarabaeus*) were seen, enjoying their favoured sunny habitats. After lunch we continued along the spectacular Jurassic Coast path towards Seacombe, and as inland botanists, we enjoyed seeing some of the first growths of common maritime plants such as Wild Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) from which cultivated Brassicas derive, Sea Beat (*Beta vulgaris*) from which beetroot and sugar beet derive, Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*), and Danish Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*) now so common along motorways.

We also saw Wild Madder (*Rupia peregrina*) high on a cliff, Sea Mayweed (*Tripleurospermum maritimum*) Sticky Mouseear (*Cerastium glomeratum*) growing on an anthill. Also on anthills were found the tiny Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*) and an equally small version of Grey Field Speedwell (*Veronica polita*).

The walk continued with the sound of skylarks overhead, rock pipits calling nearby and a hunting peregrine swooping around. We crossed a delightful sparkling stream on its way to the sea at Seacombe, and made our way uphill to the village and the famed Square and Compass Inn where Dave had a well-earned Dorset pasty and we rested over drinks.

We were almost, but not quite finished. On our way home, Dave led some of us to Corfe Common to see the pale blue flowers of Heath Violet (*Viola canina*) along with its hybrids with the darker Common Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*). We also saw Cotton Grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) with sedge-like flowers, not yet showing its tassel of white hairs.

David Pickering



Thrift - Pat Woodruffe



Early Spider Orchid - Pat Woodruffe



Barbara Last

21 April 2010

Clanger and Picket Woods

Springtime is a lovely time to be in this wood. Hamish Thomson, Woodland Trust manager for this site kindly led us around to explain the management plan to maintain the integrity of native species of this ancient wood. A programme of selective coppicing from light thinning to clear fell and restock are planned to safeguard native hotspots and in some areas

restore areas where previous over-thinning has resulted in encroaching ruderal species at the expense of woodland specialist plants. Pole stage conifers will be thinned to reduce deep shade.

The name 'Clanger' is a corruption of 'Clayhanger' meaning woodland on clay soil. The site overlies Oxford clay and slopes gently towards the north west, the steeper gradients of the southern and eastern slopes are associated with Corallian lower calcareous grit. Oak and Ash are the principal broad-leaved trees with hazel, field maple and hawthorn forming the understorey. The woodland ground flora is typical, beautiful

... beautiful primroses, bugle, strawberries ground ivy, wood forget-me-not. Early evidence of many bluebells.

primroses, bugle, strawberries ground ivy, wood forget-me-not. Early evidence of many bluebells. Spathes of purple spotted Lords and Ladies. Mossy soft gnarled hazel stools, beetle and bug rich.

A couple of beech trees and quivering aspens line the path at the top of the wood by the main path. Everywhere wispy honeysuckle, nurturing white admiral butterfly lava. Chiffchaff sing and Greenfinch wheeze. Later on early purple orchids will appear in sunny glades.

We had a delightful morning exploring this lovely wood.

Lesley Wallington



Hamish Thomson explaining

Tuesday 11th May.

Broken Bridges and Harnham Meadows

We took the Broken Bridges path from Harnham, the path first running past alder/willow carr woodland where orange balsam *Impatiens capensis* was just appearing among the enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, comfrey *Symphytum* sp. and other ground flora – including, unfortunately, Spanish bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispanica*. Going into the disused water meadows themselves, we found a tall sward with plenty of sedges, commonly lesser and greater pond sedge *Carex acutiformis* and *C. riparia*, also brown sedge *C. disticha*, common sedge *C. nigra*, and hairy sedge *C. hirta*. Notable in parts of the meadow was the abundance of adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*; we also found two species of horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and *E. palustre*. The early marsh orchids *Dactylorhiza incarnata* were still only in bud, delayed by the hard winter no doubt, but at least there were plenty of water avens *Geum*

the highlight of the day was Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, now in decline and red-listed

rivale in flower. We found ragged robin *Silene flos-cuculi*, yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum* – plants hoped for in good wet meadows – but the highlight of the day was the discovery of many plants of tubular water dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, now in decline and red-listed and, according to the Wiltshire Rare Plants Register, much less frequent in VC8 than VC7.

After lunch we visited the Harnham water meadows, which are much more heavily grazed, and by sheep rather than the cattle sometimes present on the Broken Bridges meadows. The contrast was marked, with the sward dominated by grasses such as timothy *Phleum pratense*, tufted hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata* – hardly present in the Broken Bridges meadows. The wet meadow herbs were very scarce; we found water avens and ragged robin in just one of the meads we walked. However, we did discover an area where *Ophioglossum* was abundant, in the part of the water meadow which is used to demonstrate the 'drowning' process.

Sue Fitzpatrick

21 - 23 May 2010

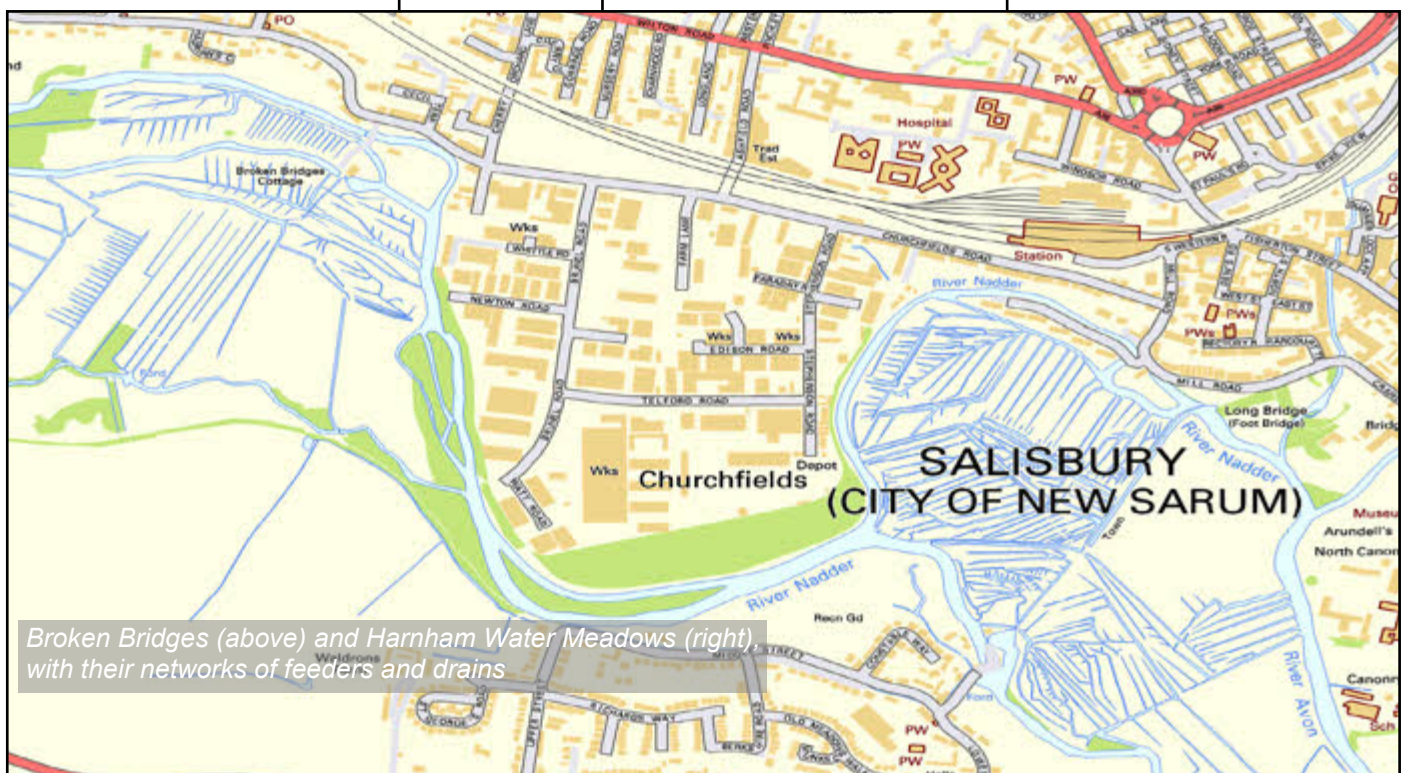
A Visit to Essex

Ken Adams, the BSBI Recorder for Essex, is a frequent visitor to Wiltshire, recording our Black Poplars and entertaining us with his presentations at winter meetings.

This time, he invited us back to Essex to join two BSBI meetings on sites in the Thames Estuary. Just six of us made the journey, staying one or two nights in B&B or hotel.

We were in a densely populated area close to the M25, hemmed in by dual carriageways and often within sight of the Canvey Island refinery. However, there are prime sites in amongst these and we were richly rewarded with familiar and unfamiliar plants in marsh and quarry sites.

Thank you Ken for your gentle and informative hosting. Now read on ...





QE2 Bridge and Littlebrook Power Station in the distance

Friday 21 May 2010

Rainham Marshes RSPB Reserve

Off to Essex for the weekend, we decided not to waste the Friday so travelled in the morning and spent a wonderful afternoon at Rainham Marshes RSPB Reserve - Anne, Sue, Pat, Richard and myself.

Not being good on birds I expected it to be a pleasant



Great Lettuce



Celery-leaved Buttercup

interval before our botany days, but I was wrong.

Birds were in quantity and quality, reed buntings and whitethroats especially abundant. Herons included a fluffy young one who eventually stretched his neck out so that he could be identified. The lapwings were a highlight, our County Bird, which has decreased in numbers so much in Wiltshire. Its aerial performance was magical. Luckily for us Sue could identify all the birdsong.

But we are, after all, botanists, and there was no shortage of great finds.

Our route took us in a big circle on board walks and paths to the accompaniment of marsh frogs croaking, quite loudly at times.

We had already identified Spotted Medick (*Medicago arabica*) in the car park and huge quantities of Hoary Cress (*Lepidium draba*) on roadsides before we arrived, and there

were lots of both species around. A very large plant of Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa Belladonna*) and Fodder Vetch (*Vicia villosa*) caught our eyes. Holly Blue butterflies were enjoying the sun.

The lapwings were a highlight, our County Bird, which has decreased in numbers so much in Wiltshire.

Celery-leaved Buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*) was in the numerous streams and ponds, as were Ivy-leaved Duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*) and Least Duckweed (*Lemna minuta*). We were excited to find Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*) but later saw plenty. Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) is a lovely plant and there were lots of clumps of Goat's Rue (*Galega officinalis*), not common in Wiltshire.

We had two nice clovers, Subterranean Clover (*Trifolium subterraneum*) and Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*)

There was plentiful *Carex otrubae* (False Fox Sedge), but also large stands of another sedge which we could not identify for sure. We later spent a whole evening in a conference room at the hotel puzzling over what we thought may be two species, and were still not sure! Ken identified it as *Carex divisa* (Divided Sedge!), which seemed to differ according to maturity.

The Reserve had been used by the Army for more than 100 years, the firing range targets date from 1906 but the visitor centre won a recent award and there was an impressive new hide, nearly finished.

We walked along the Thames towards the end of our circuit, with all its traffic. Many thanks to Pat for suggesting such an interesting venue.

Joy Newton

22nd May 2010

Gray's Chalk Quarry

Leader: - Ken Adams

From the map it did look a most unlikely spot for a joint BSBI/WBS meeting – within extensive housing estates and perilously close to our least favourite thing, a huge area of shopping emporia. In fact we were among old chalk quarries at least one of which had been filled in and covered with a housing estate but others had been rescued and now managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust.

More than 30 of us (six from WBS) met at the well-run visitor centre, and after coffee and



Birds-nest Orchid



Wild Liquorice

Then came some treats. Man Orchids behind a fence but soon a whole field of them

cakes from kind Ken and his wife we set off for Gray's Gorge, the furthest quarry and the one least managed for dog-walkers and duck-feeding families.

First up was Bastard Cabbage *Rapistrum rugosum* with its curiously shaped fruits, barely ripe as yet. Along the sunnier paths there was plenty of Goat's-rue *Galega officinalis* and a small population of Lesser Calamint *Clinopodium calamintha*, not yet in flower and some Eared Willow *Salix aurita*, or was it a hybrid?

Soon we came to the first of what turned out to be a large population of Round-leaved Wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia*. No spikes were in full flower but last year's dried fruits were remarkable shapes, like old Ottoman head-dresses. Yellow Bird's-nest *Monotropa hypopitys* were not showing but persistent spikes could be seen.

In a small lake were some green jelly balls (yes, Ken called them that) 2 or 3 cm in diameter which, he said, were very unusual colonial ciliates, with commensal algae. Weird.



"Jelly Ball"

We had our lunch close to a patch of Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*, some in full flower, and later there were others dotted about.

We climbed out of the quarry, past some stinky Black Horehound *Ballota nigra* and into a meadow which the Trust is trying to impoverish though it still looked rather too lush. Then came some treats. Man Orchids behind a fence but soon a whole field of them, so thickly growing that it was hard not to step on them. Also Wild Liquorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos* not yet in flower but with its large pale stipules most distinctive. Later there was a good patch of Yellow Vetchling *Lathyrus aphaca* – so hoped for in Wiltshire, so seldom seen.

We tramped back to the Visitor Centre, by then hot and thirsty as it had been a gloriously warm and bright day. Many of the plants we saw had been held back by the late spring but catching up fast.

Ken was a wonderful host, steering this large group with unflinching patience and cheeriness. We from Wiltshire felt it had been well worth the long trip to Essex and we still had another wonderful day to come.

Rosemary Duckett



Man Orchid

23rd May 2010

Fobbing Marshes

Joint Wiltshire Botanical Society / Botanical Society of the British Isles Meeting

Leader: Ken Adams



Least Lettuce

Slightly reduced numbers met by Fobbing Church on Sunday, but the party was still 25 strong. The site is a SSSI, parts of which are an Essex Wildlife Trust Reserve. Some land is owned by the oil refinery that could be seen in the distance as we set off across the grazing marshes. The landscape is criss-crossed by a series of banks and ditches, providing a variety of wet and dry habitats. A decrease in stocking with cattle is leading to increases in scrub that could threaten the many rare and scarce plants found here. Ken, who has carried out detailed surveys of



Stiff Saltmarsh Grass

the site, told us that it has one of only two surviving colonies of Least Lettuce, *Lactuca saligna* and we were able to find leaves of this growing in abundance on a dry bank, with Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*). Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*), Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*) and Spotted Medick (*Medicago arabica*) were also found in the same habitat. A good population of Stiff Saltmarsh-grass, *Puccinellia rupestris* (rather like *Catapodium* in appearance) occurred in a muddy spot where cattle had made a break in the bank.

Apart from familiar species such as Common Reed and False Fox-sedge (*Carex otrubae*), ditches were full of Water crowfoots, including some Brackish Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus baudotii*), and Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*). A sedge that had foxed the WBS contingent at Rainham Marshes on Friday was present in great abundance and revealed as *Carex divisa*, Divided Sedge, although most seemed to lack the very long bract that we had observed at Rainham. This is another coastal species, so we can probably be forgiven for not knowing it! At one point, Ken took off his sandals and waded a ditch to find Distant Sedge (*Carex distans*), but the rest of us chickened out and took a drier route.

After lunch in the very welcome shade of some scrub, we headed closer to the sea and found many other coastal species including Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*), now found by many inland roads as a result of winter salting. There were carpets of Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardii*) and we also saw Sea Milk-wort (*Glaux maritima*), Lesser Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia marina*), Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*) and Sea Couch (*Elymus athericus*). A successful search was made for Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*) and Hairy Buttercup (*Ranunculus*



... one of only two surviving colonies of Least Lettuce, *Lactuca saligna*

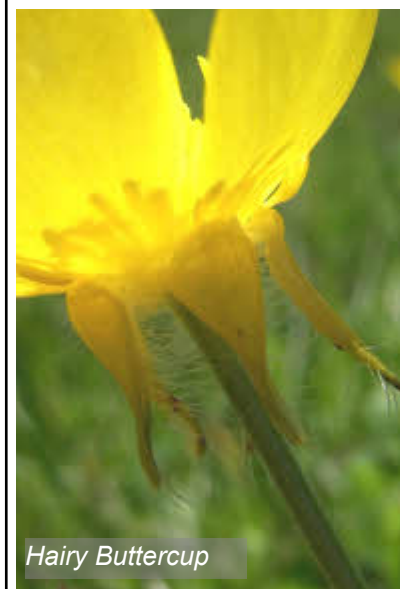
sardous) was also found on a grassy slope. A lower lying damp area yielded various saltmarsh plants including Common and Glaucous Glassworts (*Salicornia europaea* and *S. obscura*), Sea-purslane (*Atriplex portulacoides*) and Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*). Altogether very different from anything we have in Wiltshire! Nearby, a small brackish lagoon was occupied by avocets, shelducks, little egrets and mute swans to add to the skylarks, lapwings and corn buntings heard earlier in the day.

By this time, we were flagging in the heat and made our way back to our cars for the long journey home. Unfortunately, the pub in the village was shut, so our idea of welcome refreshment was thwarted!

Thanks very much to Ken for sharing his comprehensive knowledge of the site and its flora. The Wiltshire contingent certainly enjoyed their visit.

Anne Appleyard

At one point, Ken took off his sandals and waded a ditch to find Distant Sedge (*Carex distans*)



Hairy Buttercup

26th May 2010

Cherhill and Calstone Downs

Leaders: Richard Aisbitt and Joy Newton

There was a good turnout for the first trip of the year in the downs. Final count was fourteen people from WBS, two representatives from the National Trust (to show us around) and a baby. The day's job was to count the number of Burnt Orchids *Orchis ustulata* on the site this year and as many people as possible were needed so that we could spread across the site scouring along the slope where the orchids have been previously spotted.

Cherhill and Calstone SSSI is a beautiful site situated to the east of Calne. The site is home to the eighteenth century Cherhill white horse, the Bronze Age fort of Oldbury Castle and the Lansdowne obelisk erected in 1845 by the third Marquis of Lansdowne to commemorate his ancestor Sir William Petty.

We met by the A4 where people who were earlier and more organised than me looked at the interesting roses close to the road. When all were ready, we proceeded up the track to the hill. There were a number of interesting plants on the way up including Kidney (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) and Horseshoe Vetches (*Hippocrepis comosa*) and some Juniper (*Juniperus communis* subsp. *communis*) shrubs.

Once at the top, we admired the wonderful view and spotted a common lizard in the grass. It was slightly sluggish in the damp morning so we were able to have a good look. Clustered Bellflowers (*Campanula glomerata*) and the first Adonis blue of the trip were also spotted before moving onto the area where the Burnt Orchids had been recorded last year.

We carried out a thorough search of the south facing slope

Adonis Blue, Small Blue, Common Blue, Dingy Skipper, Small Heath, Wall Brown, Marsh Fritillary and at least six species of moth

for the burnt orchid. It was however, to prove elusive. In some years it had been spotted in small numbers (high teens); its absence on this trip could be ascribed to natural cycles making them less numerous or possibly the cold winter had set them back. It was noted however, that the grazing pressure has increased this year and perhaps the resident Dexter cattle had made cow candies of them.



Adonis Blue

Despite the absent Burnt Orchids this was a fantastic slope for interesting plants and Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*), Bastard Toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*) just out in flower, Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*), Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Lesser Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*), Chalk Milkwort (*Polygala calcarea*) and Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*) were all seen.

We had lunch by the Lansdown monument and admired further fantastic views. After lunch we headed into the Oldbury fort. This area, although not as species rich, still hosted a number of interesting plants. We found a good number of meadow saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) present close to the memorial, the remains of last year's Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*) and the leafy shoots of Woolly Thistle (*Cirsium Eriophorum*). The site of Oldbury castle also hosted some Field Fleawort (*Tephrosia integrifolia* subsp. *integrifolia*).



Meadow Saxifrage

On top of the wonderful flora, the fauna we saw (especially the butterflies and moths) were spectacular on this site with seven species of butterfly (Adonis Blue, Small Blue, Common Blue, Dingy Skipper, Small Heath, Wall Brown and Marsh Fritillary) and at least six species of moth. The most spectacular were the Burnet moth, the bright green Forester, Silver-Y, Mother Shipton, Wood Tiger Moth and Fox Moth (probably). Of these, the display of Adonis Blues was the highlight. Present in their thousands, there were drifts of these newly emerging metallic blue butterflies floating across the hillside as we searched for the Burnt Orchids. Then as we headed up towards the fort a Marsh Fritillary landed within a meter of me (which was very exciting, as I had never seen one before). Rounding off the day, from the top of the fort we spotted a Red Kite and Buzzard out in the distance.

This was a fantastic trip which we found highly enjoyable. Thank you to all those who arranged it.

Becky Morris



Joy Newton and Robert Morris - photo Becky

29 May 2010, morning

Chaddington Lane, Wootton Bassett

Leaders: Richard and Judy Gosnell

On a very wet morning members of WBS together with several verge monitors and Emma Glover from Wiltshire Council met for a practical morning looking at grasses as well as flowers. Chaddington Lane is a protected verge being one of over 30 which Wiltshire Council has designated for special species. Verge monitors are volunteers and have a wide range of knowledge ranging from those with botanical experience to those with little or no knowledge and are enthusiasts, which is what Richard and myself are.

Richard and I keep an eye on Chaddington Lane verge which is a wide verge about 500 metres long. It is a species rich damp grassland area on Kimmeridge clay with adders' tongue (*Ophioglossum*) known to be present. There are many grasses, sedges and rushes but also flowering plants, butterflies, birds and a good hedge. It is a place which gives much pleasure to many local people. During the years we have been monitors Richard and I have managed to identify many flowers and find the adders' tongue but the identification of the grasses and sedges has



Photo - Emma Glover



Sedges and Reeds -
Richard Gosnell

overwhelmed us. We kept trying but didn't make any progress; it was always back to the drawing board!

This was the first of several joint meetings between WBS and WC verge monitors to share knowledge and for monitors to gain some experience. We found the morning to be great fun, despite the weather, which meant notebooks and guides were not in hand. We have been enthused into persevering with grasses and have been helped with being given diagnostic hints, so useful. Another useful point was having the time to look, find and discuss and so get some confidence. Richard collected a large bagful of specimens which he has put on his computer scanner and so we have a record to look at and identify. We found adders' tongue again in a different location and logged the spot on the GPS for finding next year.

I was grateful to have the species list which I can use to check off against the list provided with the verge details by WC and I think we found some additional species.

Judy and Richard would like to thank everyone for their time and help in making the morning so enjoyable and for encouraging us to bat on. We are looking forward to visiting other verges around Wiltshire with their monitors.

Judy Gosnell: May 2010

Chaddington Lane is a protected verge being one of over 30 which Wiltshire Council has designated for special species

The meadows are notified as a County Wildlife Site and many of us felt that they deserved SSSI status

Morningside Farm

Leaders: Richard and Judy Gosnell

After a quick lunch and a chance to dry out and warm up in our cars, eleven of us ventured forth to look at a group of meadows owned by Wiltshire Council. Much to our relief, the rain stopped and the sun even popped out for a minute or two. Better still, we were so enthralled with two of the meadows that we forgot any discomforts and delighted in plants such as Greater Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, Peppercorn *Silaum silaus*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* - all species indicative of old meadows and ones which we find so infrequently.

The old ridge and furrow system could clearly be seen in two of the meadows and probably some old field boundaries too. In these we found some Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and a few plants of Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* as well as Cowslips *Primula veris* and a host of other more common herbs. Judy and Richard told us that the fields were alive with butterflies in the summer but it was both early in the season and too chilly for them on this occasion. We did however find a Forester and a Burnet Companion - both day-flying moths.

The meadows are notified as a County Wildlife Site and many of us felt that they deserved SSSI status. The two best meadows were adjacent to meadows with most of the key species present, but not as abundantly - all the fields had significant areas of these floodplain hay meadow plant communities. Above all we hope that their future management will allow this wonderful assemblage of plants to thrive. Their loss would be a significant reduction in an already horrendously depleted habitat type.

Sue Fitzpatrick

Sunday 6 June 2010

Morgan's Hill

Leader: Sharon Pilkington



Fly Orchid - photo Leif

If you want to experience the sights and sounds of a classic chalk grassland picture postcard then Morgan's Hill is one of your best bets. One of the highest points in Wiltshire and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Morgan's Hill is famous for its orchids, butterflies and for the quality of the species-rich downland.

A bunch of keen botanists gathered in the car park at one end of the reserve and set off with plenty of exciting finds in mind. A bright start promised well as we discovered several **juniper** bushes (*Juniperus communis*) growing on the steep slopes either side of the path at the entrance to the reserve. **Common Twayblade** (*Neottia ovata*) and **common spotted orchid** (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) were both present as well as one late **early purple orchid** (*Orchis mascula*). The slopes were covered in **common rock-roses** (*Helianthemum nummularium*),

Lesser Butterfly Orchids, Early Purple Orchid, Common Twayblade, Marsh Helleborine, Fly Orchids, Common Spotted Orchid, Chalk Fragrant Orchid ...

fairy flax (*Linum catharticum*) and **field forget-me-not** (*Myosotis arvensis*) and we found six or seven **field gromwell** plants (*Lithospermum arvense*), a flower which is usually associated with the margins of well-farmed arable fields.



Lesser Butterfly Orchid - photo Leif

Up on the downs we were treated to lots of **lesser butterfly orchids** (*Platanthera bifolia*) which are much shorter and stouter when growing on downland than in woodland due to being more exposed. **Wild thyme** (*Thymus polytrichus*) and **yellow rattle** (*Rhinanthus minor*) were seen too. Walking on we found another flower out of its normal habitat and that was **pignut** (*Conopodium majus*) While it usually grows in woodland it likes the alkaline soils which were present in the dip in the ground where it was growing, much lower down than anything else.



Crested Hair-grass
Koeleria macrantha

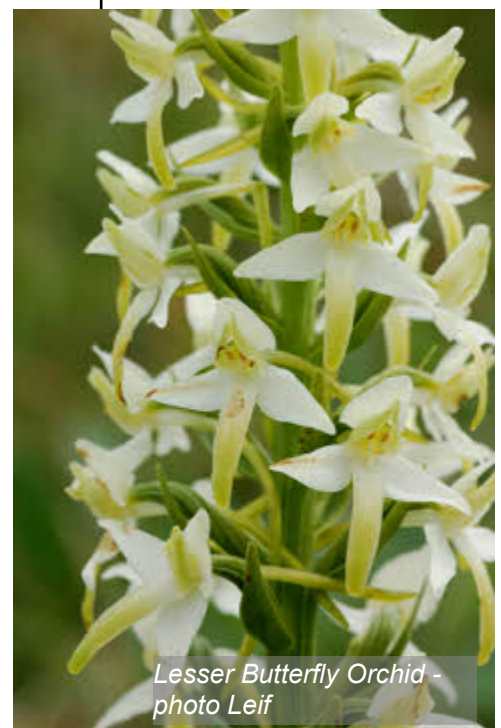
We went down into the old quarry where there were lots of emerging **chalk fragrant orchids** (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and after a lot of searching Joy eventually found us some **marsh helleborine** leaf rosettes (*Epipactis palustris*); Morgan's Hill is the only site in the UK where these orchids

grow on chalk grassland. Those with the keener eye spotted several **fly orchids** (*Ophrys insectifera*) which were hiding in the grass. While we were down there I disturbed a **duke-of-burgundy** which was the highlight butterfly of the day although we also saw **wall brown, brown argus, marsh fritillary, adonis blue** and **large skippers**. There were plenty of moths around today too (it's a good year for the day-flying species) including **six-spot burnet, mother shipton** and **wood tiger**.

After lunch in among the lesser butterfly orchids we sat down for a session on identifying grasses which, and I'm sure I speak for all of us, was extremely useful. After examining countless ligules, auricles and minute hairs we managed to identify 13 species including **meadow oat-grass** (*Helictotrichon pratense*), **downy oat-grass** (*Helictotrichon pubescens*) and three fescues: **red fescue** (*Festuca rubra*), **sheep's fescue** (*Festuca ovina*) and **meadow fescue** (*Festuca pratensis*).

A fantastic day at Morgan's Hill with plenty of orchids and grasses to keep us busy. Thanks to Sharon for leading.

Leif Bersweden



Lesser Butterfly Orchid - photo Leif

Yorkshire Dales

This year, Anne Appleyard arranged a visit to another of her old haunts, the gentle Yorkshire Dales. Most stayed in a delightful complex of farm cottages at Rathmell, south of Settle. Marjorie Waters had brought her moth trap and examining the night's catch provided daily entertainment. There was fine weather and three days of excellent trips

Sunday, 10 June 2010

Ingleton Glens and Waterfalls

The first day of our Yorkshire Dales visit was really exciting. The Ingleton Glens and Waterfalls were first opened to the public in 1885, so it is their 125th anniversary. The spectacular waterfalls, varied plant life and woodland, with fascinating geology combine to make it a very interesting place and an SSSI.

We took the path north through Swallow Glen, along the River Twiss on carboniferous limestone then over the North Craven Fault onto the Ordovician Shales and back to the Carboniferous Limestone as we followed the River Doe South.

Above Manor Bridge was what appeared to be a cave but was a mined tunnel, dug in a fruitless search for lead in the shales of the North Craven Fault.

The rocks were covered with mosses and liverworts but we neglected them for the higher plants, many of which were unfamiliar.

We noticed Russian Comfrey (*Symphytum uplandicum*) and the ubiquitous but very pretty Welsh Poppy (*Meconopsis cambrica*). The habitat was perfect for ferns and we saw Scaly Male Fern (*Dryopteris affinis*), Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Maidenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*), Soft Shield Fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) and Hard Shield fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*), all within a short time.



Marjorie and Dave - photo Lesley Wallington

A fallen tree was studded with 1p and 2p coins, hundreds of them, which intrigued us. We saw several more similarly decorated later, perhaps a local wishing tree.

Dave found Marsh Hawk's - beard (*Crepis paludosa*), and soon after darted up a steep bank and there was Limestone Fern! (*Gymnocarpium robertianum*)

There were the leaves of Giant Bellflower (*Campanula latifolia*) and Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) was quite frequent.

Suddenly we came upon an enclosure with protective cages and a notice telling us that seedlings of Lady's Slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*) were planted here. The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew had grown the seedlings, but only one appeared to have survived, with a few leaves.

We thought this would be our only sighting of this famous plant, but we saw one on each of the next two days. With only one plant truly wild, this was quite a coup for the WBS.

Wood Cranesbill (*Geranium sylvaticum*) was a delightful flower, but we soon came upon a hummock with many sedges, Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*),

Yellow Sedge (*Carex viridula* subsp. *brachyrrhyncha*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and many more, and all in quantity.

A Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*) was admired, with its caterpillar webs

We had lunch watching a Buzzard being mobbed by corvids and Swifts swooping around us. Dippers gave us lovely views of them at several places below us in the gorge.

At the head of the valley Sand Martins were busy below us, showing themselves to perfection.

Raven Bridge took us east along the road a short way, then south down the River Doe, past Snow Falls, a spectacular sight

There was a lot more woodland now, and Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*) and then Beech Fern (*Phegopteris connectilis*), both new to many of us.

It rained before we finished our circuit, but it didn't matter. For Wiltshire botanists this was a truly special place to be. We thank Anne and Dave for guiding us and finding the rarities.

Joy Newton

The habitat was perfect for ferns and we saw Scaly Male Fern, Lady Fern, Maidenhair Spleenwort, Soft Shield Fern and Hard Shield fern, all within a short time.

... more woodland now, Oak Fern and Beech Fern, new to many of us.



Beech Fern - note the angle of the lowest pinnae

Monday, 14 June 2010

Malham Tarn NNR

On Monday, 14th June 2010 we visited the National Nature Reserve at Malham Tarn. The drive from Settle had been quite wonderful, winding up along narrow lanes with a patchwork of fields on either side, all edged with dry stone walls, each one a work of art. The lane to the National Trust Centre was edged with Sweet Cecily, *Myrrhis odorata*. Could the day get better?

Martin Davies, the site manager, led us on to the Bog/Fen Board walk. The site has quite a list of "Credentials" being: The first National Nature Reserve, 1992, - Ramsar Site, 1993, S.A.C. 2001, Organic Status, 2006. Martin explained that Willow spread was the main problem on the Reserve with the organic status complicating some of the options. Dexters and Blue/Grey Cattle (Black Galloway X White Shorthorn Bull) were helping to control the scrub, the Dexters being especially keen and standing on their hind legs to reach the branches. Each side of the boardwalk was an exciting array of plants. Too many to note really! Meadow Sweet and Water Avens, Northern Marsh Orchid, Marsh Valerian, Ragged Robin, Hare's-tail Cotton-grass, *Eriophorum vaginatum*, Globe Flower, *Trollius Europaeus*, Fibrous Tussock Sedge, *Carex appropinquata*. A few of the Water Avens, *Geum rivale* had strangely shaped flowers which Sue explained as "teratogenic"

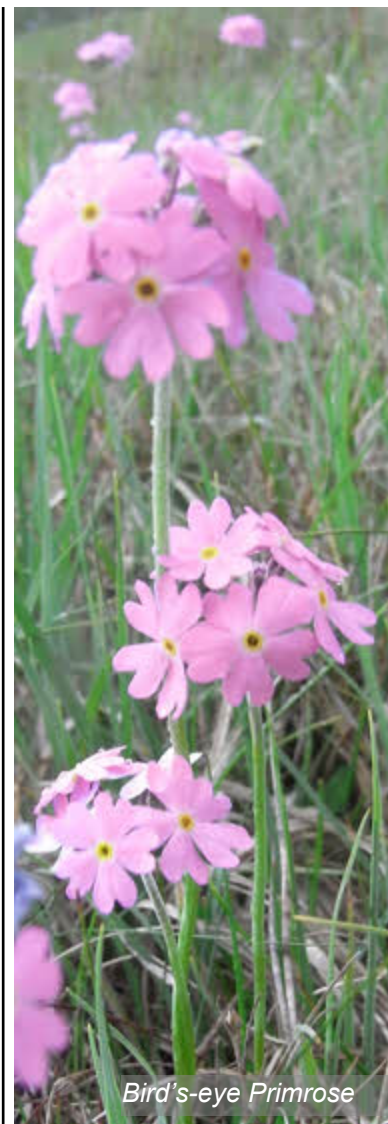


Globe Flower

We could hear Curlew calling and there seemed to be Willow Warblers calling from every bush. It seemed strange to see Oyster Catchers nest here, too, and to hear their call so often heard from the seashore.

(mutated). We could hear Curlew calling and there seemed to be Willow Warblers calling from every bush. It seemed strange to see Oyster Catchers nest here, too, and to hear their call so often heard from the seashore.

Now we were seeing Flea Sedge, *Carex pulicaris*, Marsh Arrowgrass, *Triglochin palustre*, lots of Deer Grass, *Trichophorum cespitosum* (formerly *Scirpus cespitosus*), bright Marsh Marigolds and the wonderful Bird's-eye Primrose, *Primula farinosa*. Tawny Sedge, *Carex hostiana*, Bottle Sedge, *C. rostrata* ... the visit to the Fen is in danger of turning into a plant list. This is inevitable as the plants were so many so exciting and so varied. We came off the boardwalk and on to Fen area; the ground went up and down as we walked on it in a slightly disconcerting way. Now Bog Bean, Early Purple Orchid and Marsh Cinquefoil. The landscape around us had been formed by glaciation. The options for the care of this area were damming (to keep the water level up) and work with local farmers to keep farmland streams free of pollution. Martin was a great enthusiast and optimistic. This is good, as the areas in his care seemed quite daunting! Now for PLANT OF THE DAY! Dave found it – the needle in the haystack- **Large Yellow Sedge, *Carex flava***. This was the site of the only true population of this plant in Britain. Other sites are probably hybrids. It was strange to find English Scurvy-grass, *Cochlearia anglica*, and tiny Cranberry plants. Someone fished out Bladderwort (*australis*?) but not in flower. White Sedge, *Carex canescens* (formerly *Carex curta*) and a wonderful patch of Mossy Saxifrage (at a quick glance like Meadow Saxifrage) In this area students were invertebrate hunting in the 26, rather square, ponds created in this area for study. Now Brown Sedge, *Carex disticha*, Lesser Pond Sedge, *Carex acutiformis*, Bog Asphodel and the leaves of Common Wintergreen, *Pyrola*



Bird's-eye Primrose

minor – normally in flower at this time of the year.

We were treated to a quick bus ride to Ha Mire via the Field Study Centre. Great stretches of Lousewort, Butterwort and Bird's-eye Primrose. A lovely site. At the Centre we saw the Lady's Slipper Orchid (Caged!) and heard about its re-introduction to several sites in the area. These were the Plants raised at Kew of the Genetically British strain of the Orchid, the European one being lustier than ours! There – I haven't mentioned *Crepis paludosa*, Marsh Hawk's Beard, or Tower Mustard, *Arabis glabra* and the ever-present Ladies Mantle (sp!) all of which seemed to appear from site to site. As you can guess, it was some morning! A day to remember, cherish and repeat.

Marjorie Waters

Monday June 14th 2010

Afternoon Walk to Janet's Foss

After a hasty lunch in the car park at Malham we met up with Mike Canaway of the Craven Conservation Trust for our afternoon walk to the waterfall. After a brief introductory talk which included reference to the special Polypodies to be found in the glen and a Hazard Assessment (they do things properly in Yorkshire) we set off alongside the stream, which was colourful with garden flowers among the local wild species. The banks had been reinforced with woven willow, which was already sprouting. A path across fields led us past fine displays of Crosswort *Cruciata laevipes* and Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys* to the entrance to the National Trust Reserve. There on the bank we found the first special plant of the afternoon, Limestone Bedstraw *Galium sternerii* growing on a grassy bank. As we progressed through the woodland Mike pointed out one of the Polypodies in an inaccessible location and we had fine views of a Dipper tranquilly foraging. At the head of the glen we came to the waterfall with its mass of tufa screening what was said to be the hiding place of the fairy Janet or Jennet. There were huge leaves of Giant Butterbur *Petasites japonicus* alongside the stream and high up on the cliff on the opposite bank were two Polypodies, *Polypodium font-querii* (a special local species) and *P. vulgare* as were the leaves of Lesser Meadow Rue *Thalictrum minus*. As we left the reserve we passed a Spindle *Euonymus europaeus* covered in blossom and a Bird Cherry *Prunus padus* heavily infested with Ermine Moth Caterpillars.

Crossing the lane we continued up to Goredale Scar. The rugged nature of the scenery was tamed by the well-maintained level path with banks alongside displaying

familiar limestone plants and, high up on the cliff face, we saw our first Bloody Cranesbill *Geranium sanguineum*. The scar was dramatic, with the waterfall crashing down the rocks; there were Brittle Bladder Fern *Cystopteris fragilis*, Maidenhair Spleenwort *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, Wall Rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria* and Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia* growing on the cliffs, while House Martins flew in and out of their nesting holes higher up.

After a brief stop at a wayside trailer for very welcome tea and cake, we made our way back to Malham along the lane, with nothing of great note except a nice display of Meadow Cranesbill *Geranium pratense* as we came close to the village. Also, there were large patches of Spiny Restharrow close to the A365 at Atworth along the lane that leads to Neston at SD862661. There were several plants of a white form too.

Gillian King

Tuesday 15 June 2010

Scar Close – Ingleborough NNR

The day dawned fine, giving us the warmest weather of our three days in the Yorkshire Dales. Colin Newlands, the National Nature Reserve site manager, met us, complete with pot-grown and flowering Lady's Slipper Orchid, grown under the Sainsbury's-funded species recovery programme. Brian Burrow of the BSBI also joined us. Both were invaluable at making our visit informative and enjoyable.

As we made our way up to Scar Close limestone pavement, there were many fine views of the expansive Dales landscape. Before we had even reached the enclosed pavement we were shown *Hieracium diaphanoides* and Baneberry (*Actaea spicata*)

and had found Hairy Stonecrop (*Sedum villosum*).

The limestone pavement itself, as the name suggests, is enclosed by a wall which excludes the sheep that graze the adjacent land. The effects of this are clear to see with stunted trees and scrub such as ash and hazel growing in the grykes. This still leaves plenty of room for interesting herbaceous flora to thrive, both in the grykes and on the clints. This unique habitat supports a flora which in places reflects the alkaline nature of the limestone, but also has more acid-loving plants in the places where thin, leached soils have built up. This is coupled with the contrast between the damp shady grykes with their ferns, including Green Spleenwort (*Asplenium viride*), and the hotter drier places. Personally, I was bowled over by the variety of the flora, with plants that are normally found in very different habitats growing close to one another. This shows how special and valuable a habitat limestone pavement is.

Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majus*), Stone Bramble (*Rubus saxatilis*), Bird's-eye Primrose (*Primula farinosa*) and Lesser Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum minus*) were just a few of the plants which went to make this morning special.

Colin Newlands, the National Nature Reserve site manager, met us, complete with pot-grown and flowering Lady's Slipper Orchid



Of course, fine weather always helps!

Paul Darby



Friday 25 June 2010

Jones's Mill WWT Reserve, Pewsey

Leaders: Jane Brown and
Paul Darby

Thirteen members (and budding botanist baby Robert) came to this wonderful reserve - a mainly acid soligenous mire (i.e. fed by ground water). There is surrounding woodland and a hay-meadow. Acid mire is a rare habitat in Wiltshire. It's fed by the head-waters of the Avon - certainly the water looks very clean - and it harbours brown trout and river lamprey. A large section of the reserve is an SSSI and the Trust has bought extra land to buffer it.

The woodland turned up huge 3-foot tussocks of Greater Tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata*, with Stone Parsley *Sison amomum* and Blue Water-speedwell *Veronica anagallis-aquatica* in the stream.

The first meadow was easily negotiable because of the drought but still full of interest. Some meadows are cut once a year - others are grazed by a few Belted Galloways in summer, whose hoof-prints help some annuals to germinate. The plants included Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca*, Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*, Brown Sedge *C. disticha*, Lesser



Botanists on the boardwalk

... huge
3-foot
tussocks of
Greater
Tussock-
sedge *Carex
paniculata*

Pond-sedge *C. acutiformis* and Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris* - all rare in Wiltshire. Also Common Spotted *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and Southern Marsh Orchid *D. praetermissa* with hybrids, Common Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre* (smooth to touch) and Fen Bedstraw *Galium uliginosum* (rough with mucronate tips - thanks to Jane for lesson!). Also Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, Water Avens *Geum rivale*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris* and Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*.

The second marshy meadow had Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, Common Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, Marsh Foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus* and Changing Forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor*. Plenty of insects too - Large Skipper, Hornet, Broad-

Bodied Chaser and Black-Tailed Skimmer.

A few of us stayed for the afternoon and did a circuit taking in the Kennet and Avon canal South of the reserve - well worth it as this section of canal has wonderful banks - obviously less damaged by boat traffic than elsewhere. Two nice finds were Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia* in its land and water forms and Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata*, that we sought in vain on the reserve.

Jane took even fewer of us into arable land south of Pewsey to see Yellow Vetchling *Lathyrus aphaca* flowering beside a track.



Yellow Vetchling



Amphibious Bistort

Many thanks to Jane (Reserve Warden) and Paul for showing us this unique reserve.

Simon Young

Saturday, July 3rd 2010

Wadswick Common, near Box

Lyn Adams (verge monitor)
and Pat Woodruffe.

This was our second session with verge monitors and, as last time, WBS members outnumbered monitors. This did not matter one scrap as the verges we were here to look at were wonderfully rich – chalk grassland – with enough to entertain, and teach, all of us. The verge monitors had at least one tutor each and the rest of us sorted out our Common and Greater Knapweeds *Centaurea nigra* and *C. scabiosa* (again!), were pleased to see lots of Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, some Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and so on. We also had time to work on grasses, always a needed lesson for some of us. The first of the Marbled White butterflies were on the wing, and with clement weather and good company it was a delightful way to spend the morning.

Lyn provided drinks and delicious sticky cakes after we had been at it for an hour or more, which were most welcome.

Anne and Sue made a proper species list for the whole of the designated verge, a long list for such a position and included the surprise of a small clump of Spurge Laurel *Daphne laureola* growing under a hedge.

Some of us went on to Bradford on Avon and ate our lunch on parched lawns (no rain for weeks) beside the canal and then walked along the towpath. There were good examples of Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum* and other watery plants. Then we found a luxuriant growth of Knotted Hedge-parsley *Torilis nodosa*, of all things. It is supposed to

favour dry banks and trampled places and here it was growing with Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus* in a canal bank, with wet feet.

Rosemary Duckett



Tuesday 13 July 2010

Home Farm, Cholderton

Nine hardy perennials met at Home Farm on one of very few wet days this summer. It is always a pleasure to record on Henry Edmunds' land and there is no telling what might be found. On this occasion we did not visit the area which had been suggested when the summer programme was compiled because the access was poor but instead we looked at some chalk grassland lying to the north of the reservoirs and close to the A303. The reservoirs supply water to the public and this privately owned company, known as the Cholderton and District Water Company, was established by an Act of Parliament over 100 years ago. Currently it supplies over 2000 people through some 800 service connections.

It seems likely therefore that the grasslands that we were surveying have been relatively undisturbed for many years: possibly 100. Some parts seemed to be of quite high quality short turf but coarse grasses, cleavers and nettles dominated other areas. One section had been planted with pine trees and in other places dogwood, hawthorn and birch scrub had developed. We split into several groups to record as much as possible whilst the weather remained dry. Our amalgamated list produced a tally of some 98 species including 16 grasses and just 1

Our amalgamated list produced a tally of some 98 species including 16 grasses and just 1 sedge

sedge – *Carex flacca*. The list of herbs included some interesting plants such as Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Sainfoin *Onobrychis viciifolia*, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Carline Thistle *Carlina vulgaris* and Basil Thyme *Clinopodium acinos* whilst the grasses ranged from Tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*, a coarse invader of high quality turf, to Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*, one of the more fine-leaved species.

Just as we felt that we had explored most corners of this site and had earned our lunch, the heavens opened. At least the recording sheets had remained more or less dry! It was at this moment that Sue and I put forward an irresistible proposal to occupy us for the afternoon. Just a few miles away lies the RSPB reserve at Winterbourne Downs. It forms an important link between the ranges at Porton and parts of Salisbury Plain and so a considerable acreage is being reverted from arable land to permanent, flower-rich grassland. Several WBS members have helped to record the development of one field over the past few years and this year we were asked to undertake a second one. Time was pressing as the RSPB farm manager was keen to cut the grass and so the help offered by members that afternoon was very much appreciated. Quite incredibly, the rain ceased and we were able to record 1 meter square quadrats in an 'M' pattern over the field. The seed had been sourced from several SSSIs and sown just four seasons ago, with remarkably good results. The speed with which dreaded arable weeds (such as Prickly Sow-thistle *Sonchus asper*, Cleavers *Galium aparine* and various Speedwells *Veronica* spp.) have given way to Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, Cowslip *Primula veris*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and others has to be seen to be believed. Perhaps we should have a meeting there next year.

Pat Woodruffe

Sunday 18th July 2010

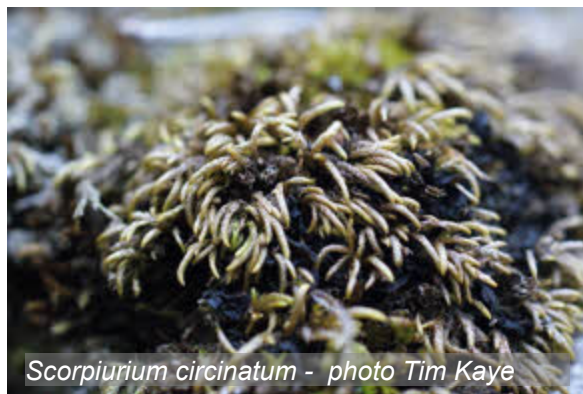
Crook Peak

Leader: Sharon Pilkington

To learn new things is a constant enrichment in our lives. Take for example the boring journey along the M5 which cuts through the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. I must have driven past Crook Peak countless times without realising its significance, but when I do so now I will think about its stunning views and correspondingly interesting botany. It is a SSSI managed by the National Trust and comprises woodlands, unimproved calcareous grassland and acidic grassland where glacial loess has been deposited. As well as unimproved I could also add impoverished: fried, baked or crisped when we went! So dry had the weather been for the past few weeks that most steps we made had a certain crunch as mint moths (*Pyrausta ostrinalis*) took their scuttering flight across the steep limestone faces.

This along with Brean Down is the site made famous by Dillenius and Druce as the home of Somerset Hair grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*). Dozens of botanists have no doubt passed it by thinking it Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) but under the sharp eyes of Sharon we soon found some likely specimens. Under close examination they clearly were the Somerset rarity having a reticulate form to the lower sheaths.

Now I have to admit that the vascular plants were not at their best and my attention was taken by Side-fruited Crisp-moss (*Pleurochaete squarrosa*) though remnants of Common



Scorpiurium circinatum - photo Tim Kaye

Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) and Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) were found scattered amongst the scree. The next plant to be sought was Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) but we were unsuccessful here and



Honewort - Tim Kaye

found some interesting snails instead alongside a weirdly shaped yew (*Taxus baccata*). On investigation they turned out to be Round-mouthed Snail (*Pomatias elegans*) and Lapidary Snail (*Helicigona lapicida*) – thank you Rosemary! From reading this report we must come across as very unfocused

botanists, I don't think Druce would have approved. We did find some Silver Hair-grass (*Aira praecox*) though alongside Tamarisk Scalewort (*Frullania tamarisci*).

We eventually clambered up to the ridge which was scattered with Lesser Hawkbit (*Leontodon saxatilis*) and occasional Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*). A small group of retired men were flying radio-controlled planes from this magnificent promontory. We could view the Somerset Levels, Brean Down, Glastonbury Tor and the ant-like procession of cars on the M5. Wandering along the ridge we dropped down slightly to the wetter Northern side, which would have been a good site for Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*), and Slender Bedstraw (*Galium pumilum*). It

wasn't though, so lunch was initiated.

After a refreshing bite we got our teeth into liverworts. It sounds unlikely but one of the diagnostic features of Bitter Scalewort (*Porella arborescens*) is that it tastes peppery on the end of the tongue. I can vouch for this and the more humid chinks of rocks also yielded Curving Feather-moss (*Scorpiurium circinatum*), Variable Crisp-moss (*Trichostomum brachydontium*), Lesser Featherwort (*Plagiochila porelloides*) and Rough Earwort (*Scapania aspersa*), all really nice species to find bryologically. The vascular plants could only make us scratch our heads over specimens of Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) which we thought could be Little Robin (*Geranium purpureum*) but they weren't!

Continuing on we encountered a small bit of limestone pavement which on closer inspection revealed lots of small plants in the umbellifer family. They were Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) of course hunkering down, biding their time and hoping for a drop of rain. Having seen them at Berry Head I knew what to look though I doubt the casual dog walker would have. There is probably not the same sort of conservation problem with this species as you get with Lady Slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*)! On approaching the highest spot at Crook Peak we had a good look for the pink and the bedstraw but our search came to nothing. On perambulating back to the car park we observed the acidic patches created by the glacial loess were Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) was growing alongside calcareous plants such as Thyme and Salad Burnet. So no blousy pinks but still a bounty for those prepared to take a closer look at some of our botanical treasures. Thanks to Sharon for her usual patience and uber-knowledge.

Tim Kaye

Friday 23 July 2010

Calstone and Cherhill Downs (second visit)

Leaders: Chris Gingell and Keith Steggall

For our second visit this year, fourteen of us gathered on Cherhill Down to search for Tuberous Thistle *Cirsium tuberosum*. This is a "Red Data Book" species that is listed as "Nationally Rare" and "Near Threatened". It has a stronghold on Salisbury Plain and has been recorded on Calstone and Cherhill Downs. We went looking for it last year, but only found its hybrid with Dwarf (or picnic!) Thistle *Cirsium acaule*, called *Cirsium x medium*. Chris Gingell and Keith Steggall from the National Trust, which owns and manages the down, had joined us earlier this year to look for Burnt Orchid. Chris told us he knew where Tuberous Thistle was growing and would guide us to it on this visit. He was as good as his word.

We found several hybrid plants on our way up, marked by their short flower stems with white woolly hairs at the top and bottle-brush hairs at the bottom. Our search of Chris's favoured site was moderately successful; he found us one plant with a tall flower-stem covered in woolly hairs from head to toe, with softly-prickled leaves and a round base to the flower head. There was a patch of similar foliage where the flower stems had been eaten off by cattle (Tuberous Thistle spreads by rhizomes and can form dense stands) and another plant that looked almost perfect, but had rather spiny leaves, so was perhaps a little bit hybrid. There were also plenty of obvious hybrids in this area.

Hybrid thistles are male-sterile, so will only set seed if they are pollinated by either of the parents. As Dwarf Thistle is common on close-grazed

downland, the seedlings produced tend to be more and more like the Dwarf Thistle. It was good to find at least some of the pure-bred tuberous parents. They were in longer grass which does not favour the Dwarf Thistle.



The absolute highlight was an insect, not a plant. The Wart-biter *Decticus verrucivorus* is a large green cricket which has one of its last remaining British habitats on Calstone Down. It is a red data book species and is listed as vulnerable. It is also a BAP priority species and is on various schedules for protection. And we saw it. Keith knew where and how to look for it and found one posing for us in the grass, bright green, beautiful and with great long antennae. He told us that the Wart-biter is extremely fussy about its habitat, needing bare earth, short grass, longer grass and tussocks. As part of the "Save the Wart-biter" programme, they were about to introduce it onto a suitable part of Calstone Down when an existing population was discovered. Since then, yearly censuses have often found several hundred individuals. Yes, it really was used to bite warts.

There were other delights: Round-headed Rampion, Bastard Toadflax, knapweeds and so on.

Richard Aisbitt

... a tall flower-stem covered in woolly hairs from head to toe, with softly-prickled leaves and a round base to the flower head

Sunday 1 August 2010, morning

Coate Water Country Park

Karl Curtis, the Senior Ranger, took us down to the nature reserve area on the east of Coate Water to explore the wet meadows and swampy edges of the lake. Jack Oliver and Mark Kitchen found willows to and some elms puzzle over. There was Sallow, Cricket-bat Willow, and Hybrid Crack-willow *Salix x rubens* (*Salix alba* x *Salix fragilis*). The Elm turned out to be Huntingdon Elm (another hybrid, *Ulmus x vegeta*, *Ulmus glabra* x *Ulmus minor*). Sedges also provided interest. Although the fields had been mown, there was identifiable Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta* in the cut areas and wide stands of Greater Pond-sedge *Carex riparia* in a fenced-off part. There was also dense growth of Slender Pond-sedge *Carex acuta* beside a stream. This has been recorded at Coate before, but is uncommon and has only a few sites in Wiltshire. Brown Sedge *Carex disticha* was tucked under the fence on the edge of *Carex riparia* and Remote Sedge *Carex remota* was growing beside a boardwalk.

The Lesser Duckweed in the stream might have had a hidden extra mixed in with it, Red Duckweed *Lemna turionifera*, which has red coloration round the roots. This is a new alien, first recorded in the UK in 2007 – samples taken and confirmation awaited. [Final answer - not *L. turionifera*, but good old *Lemna minor*]

Tim Kaye joined us on our return and, after a lunch on the grass, took us out to look for arable weeds at Bishopstone.

Richard Aisbitt



Eastbrook Farm

North Wessex Downs AONB was kind enough to grant us some money to undertake arable plant surveys on farms within Swindon. I was keen to undertake a project of this kind as my knowledge of arable plants is paltry to say the least and it gave me an incentive to increase my knowledge. One of these farms belongs to Helen Browning, has been organic since 1986 and comprises some 1337 acres. It is leased from the church and sweeps through a dry ice-age valley from chalk to clay in the picturesque village of Bishopstone.

The society had already surveyed the site and found some real treats but the keen eyes of three county recorders added many more to the list. The focus was a turnip field grown for cattle fodder. Leading to the field along the path we again spotted Night-flowering Catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*), which on close inspection had small flies stuck to its many sticky hairs. Just next to it someone pointed out Corn Knotgrass (*Polygonum rurivagum*). How we had overlooked it last time is anyone's guess. Perhaps our attention was taken up by the Catchfly, a plant very rarely recorded in Wiltshire. There was lots of smoke-weed about and after close inspection one turned out to be *Fumaria officinalis* subsp. *wirtgenii*, as well as the ubiquitous *Fumaria officinalis* subsp. *officinalis*. Indeed it was worth looking closer at the well known as Grey Field Speedwell (*Veronica polita*) was found amongst the Common Field Speedwell (*Veronica persica*). The fruits of the latter do not diverge as you can see from the picture (next page). Every step was a delight as we admired the Saddleback pigs happily rooting around their pens. Drifts of Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*) and Lucerne (*Medicago sativa* subsp. *sativa*) and Borage (*Borago officinalis*) were scattered in ruts and pockets near the happy porcines.



Above:
Eastbrook
piggies

Right, from
top:

Night-
flowered
Catchfly
(with caught
fly)

Field
Madder

Round-
leaved
Fluellen

Sharp-
leaved
Fluellen

Below:
Cornflowers



Picking our way through the turnips we found robust plants of Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) and Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*). The latter gets a high score on Plantlife's Important Arable Plant Area survey criteria so this was very encouraging. But the fun didn't stop there, as there were swathes of Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*) and Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*). The reasoning often goes that once the round-leaved is found then the sharp-leaved can soon be found nearby. And sure enough after a bit of searching in a field corner we found *Kickxia elatine* as well.

All along the top edge of the field there were masses of Venus's Looking Glass (*Legousia hybrida*) alongside such plants as Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*) and Fool's Parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*). Venus's Looking Glass gets its name from the shiny brown seeds housed inside their open capsule thought to resemble looking glasses presumably used by the Roman Goddess of Love and Beauty! Finally we stumbled across Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*). There was one large plant frothing with hover flies and after we had photographed and admired it, a second plant was found nearby. A very rare plant anywhere and after asking the site manager, he confirmed that he hadn't sown it. I am used to seeing it everywhere in my garden but not in its arable setting so this was an amazing find. Even the dung heaps near the cars got a look in but only revealed Red Goosefoot (*Chenopodium rubrum*) and not one of the rarer ones. The site manager is happy to have repeat visits in future years so we will have to see what else pops up next year.

Tim Kaye

Arable Plant Surveys

Many thanks to those volunteers who took part in this years surveys. Some of the highlights were Night-flowering catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*), Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*), Rye Brome (*Bromus secalinus*) and Flixweed (*Descurainia sophia*). I am aiming to do some more surveys next year so if anyone wants to be put on a volunteer list please contact me. Dates for 2011 are not confirmed but will be June – August time and flexible to peoples commitments.

Tim Kaye



Weasel's Snout - Tim Kaye

16 August, morning

Coopers Meadow, Marlborough

Leaders: Jack Oliver and Joan Davies

On the morning of Sunday 15th August 2010 twenty members of the Wiltshire Botanical Society carried out a plant survey at Coopers Meadow, Marlborough. Members were pleased that two members of Action for the River Kennet (ARK) were present.

Coopers Meadow is an old water meadow (of about 1 hectare) in the centre of Marlborough, on the south side of the river Kennet, at SU190689. The meadow is an amenity site which has not been used for agriculture for very many years. Until two years ago the water meadow was regularly mowed by Marlborough Town Council.



In 2008 ARK, with support from others, initiated the Coopers Meadow project for chalk stream habitat restoration and to employ a different grass management regime. In December 2008 hybrid poplars along the river bank were felled to let more light reach the river bed and bank and in June 2009 a cattle grazing trial started on half of the water meadow, which in 2010 was extended to a second grazing area.

The area covered in the plant survey included the whole of the area known as Coopers Meadow; namely the two grazing areas, including a recently excavated wetter area, the mown border around the grazing enclosures with its line of different species of trees, the bank of the river Kennet and the plants along the edge and in the narrow water channel which runs round three sides of the meadow. The cattle were not present when the survey was made. They were present for a month in June and expected to return in September.

It is important to note that the plant survey was carried out in late summer and therefore no spring flowers were recorded.

To ease the task of recording, two days before the event Jack Oliver prepared a list of the easy to see and identify plants. On the Sunday morning members worked in groups with a copy of the pre-prepared list and added 25 new finds, making a total of 167 taxa in all. These consisted of:

Fruits of Field-speedwells - Tim Kaye

ARK, with support from others, initiated the Coopers Meadow project for chalk stream habitat restoration

1. 127 dicotyledons, which included 117 species, 9 hybrids and 1 variant.
2. 37 monocotyledons, which included 27 grasses, 3 sedges, 3 rushes and 4 others. This section could be expanded by a spring survey.
3. 1 fern, 1 horsetail and 1 conifer, a total of 10 hybrids (4 docks, 3 willows, 1 lime, 1 water speedwell and 1 grass).

There were 11 *Rumex* taxa and 7 *Salices*, which made these two genera the best represented within and around Coopers Meadow.

Like many other places in Wiltshire and particularly in Hampshire a conspicuous feature was the browning of the leaves on the Horse-chestnut trees around the perimeter. This is caused by heavy infestations with the Horse-chestnut Leaf-miner moth caterpillars. More serious was some evidence of Bacterial Bleeding Canker afflicting the trunks of some of the trees. This can kill Horse-chestnuts and is caused by *Pseudomonas syringae* pv. *aesculi*: however other less serious bark conditions caused by fungi or *Phytophthora* can mimic the *Pseudomonas* bleeding trunk canker.

Members of Wiltshire Botanical Society spent an enjoyable morning in Coopers Meadow and hope that the results of this plant survey will enable comparisons to be made with any future plant survey so that any environmental improvements which have been made to the meadow and its surroundings by the ARK grazing trial and other works can be noted.

Jack Oliver and Joan Davies



WBS members in the excavated area - Joan Davies

16 August, afternoon

Savernake Forest

Leaders: Jack Oliver and Joan Davies

We so missed having Joy with us as leader on this occasion but we were more than grateful to Jack Oliver and to Joan Davies for searching out some lovely things for us to see. Our first stop was at the southern end of the wood for a picnic lunch. Close to the site were some *Epipactis*, which had gone over. They were dark-stemmed and quite robust specimens, which we agreed, were Purple Helleborine *E. purpurea*. Close by was a much smaller, greener plant and Sharon Pilkington, having looked at a photograph, now believes that this was Green-flowered Helleborine *E. phyllanthus*. There are three main characteristics to separate this species from the more common Broad-leaved Helleborine *E. helleborine*: it has no hairs, or very few, on the ovary and upper stem, the hypochile is greenish-white and the cilia on the edges of the leaves are irregularly bunched. We can only really confirm the first of these, so perhaps the final judgement must wait another year. We walked further south down the main ride and soon found many more specimens of *E. purpurea* in much better condition together with an astounding growth of the Giant Polypore *Meripilus*



Violet Helleborine



The ancient hawthorn

The main stool had a number of old branches arising from it and several of these had rooted where they touched the ground

giganteus growing from the base of a beech tree. Having feasted our eyes on these goodies and, in many cases, made sure a few pictures were stored for future reference (and perhaps the odd write-up) we then headed westwards into unknown territory – for me, at least. Jack and Joan led us around in a large loop, at one point skirting the edge of the wood where we had a distant view of Tottenham Park House, which is becoming increasingly derelict.



Small-leaved Lime

We passed several trees of merit including an elderly silver birch *Betula pendula*. The species is never long-lived but this specimen was certainly well into retirement. Close by was an interesting oak *Quercus robur* with many

burrs. Jack suggested that they might be a response to damage by arthropods, bacteria, fungi, viruses or nematodes. Our next stop was the highlight of the afternoon, a huge hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. It is hard to guess how many years this tree had witnessed but it was certainly large and full of character. The main stool had a number of old branches arising from it and several of these had rooted where they touched the ground. From these 'new' trees healthy young stems were regenerating, so ensuring that the stock would continue for many more years. It was not only the tree that provided interest but also the various

Photos: Pat Woodruffe

plants associated with it: Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* growing in the decaying main stool, numerous bryophytes as well as Broad Buckler Fern *Dryopteris dilatata* and Intermediate Polypody *Polypodium interjectum* growing as epiphytes. A specimen of *Auricularia auricula-judae* (Now called Jelly-ear) caused some discussion since it is almost always associated with Elder. This material did seem to be growing out of the trunk of the Hawthorn but in fact, when we looked more closely, a rotting piece of Elder was indeed its benefactor.

We moved on to inspect a Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata*. It was good to see the fruits still erect – one of the most useful diagnostic features to separate this ancient woodland indicator species from either the hybrid lime of parks and gardens *T. x europaea* or the more rare Large-leaved Lime *Tilia platyphyllos*. By now we were heading back towards the cars but there were a few treats still in store. Firstly, there was a group of black caterpillars on a young birch. We decided these were sawfly larvae and I sent a photograph to John Grearson who has confirmed that they are *Croesus latipes* and that he has records from only four Wiltshire sites, excluding this new one from Savernake. Our final find came from a boggy clearing amongst the trees where there was a healthy population of *Lythrum portula* Water Purslane. Although the flowers can scarcely be described as conspicuous (1mm, pinkish, with six or no petals, solitary at the base of the leaves), there were quite a few to be seen with the aid of a lens.

Our very grateful thanks once again to Joan and Jack for stepping in when needed.

Pat Woodruffe



Water Purslane

Sunday 12 September
2010

New Forest: Pigbush



Sixteen of us spent a most enjoyable day under the most able leadership of Sharon Pilkington exploring wet heaths, mires and watercourses to the southwest of Pigbush.

We made the usual botanical start in the carpark where Richard found *Agrostis capillaris* (Common Bent), but we progressed to more exciting things via a delightful oak wood. In this year's dry conditions the ponies have severely grazed wet areas normally left undisturbed, but there was plenty of *Agrostis curtisii* (Bristle Bent) on our first open heath. This delightful grass with a very long ligule has a southwest distribution only, but is common here.

In a damper area, we found *Betula pubescens* (Downy Birch), *Myrica gale* (Bog Myrtle), *Drosera intermedia* (Oblong-leaved Sundew – with plenty of Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* in drier parts), *Succisa pratensis* (Devil's-bit Scabious), *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), *Juncus bulbosus* (Bulbous Rush, showing vivipary), *Scutellaria minor* (Lesser Skullcap), *Hypericum elodes* (Marsh St John's Wort), *Senecio aquaticus* (Marsh Ragwort) and *Ranunculus flammula* (Lesser Spearwort).

Sharon's casual magic now produced three much less common species. *Illecebrum verticillatum* (Coral Necklace) with bright red creeping stems and tiny pink flowers, followed by



Coral Necklace



Marsh Gentian

superb specimens of *Gentiana pneumonanthe* (Marsh Gentian); we saw many more of this breathtaking plant later in the day. At this point, Sharon had competition from a silver-studded blue that Tom was chasing, but with further sleight of hand, called us to heel with a glorious patch of *Lycopodiella inundata* (Marsh Clubmoss). The New Forest is the best place in lowland Britain to find this fussy plant which likes trampled peaty tracks and is showing by its fruiting strobili that it is thriving here and has much increased in the past two years.

Not to thwarted by mere plants, a clouded yellow appeared to further distract the weaker botanists (well, it was a glorious still day!). We learned that *Salix repens* (Creeping Willow) is the only one with a creeping rootstock, and how to recognise *Ulex Minor* (Dwarf Gorse).

After lunch our circular tour continued and we saw two further New Forest specials: *Rhynchospora fusca* (Brown-beaked Sedge) and *Ludwigia palustris* (Hampshire Purslane). Both these have commoner counterparts: *Rhynchospora alba* (White-beaked Sedge) and *Lythrum portula* (Water Purslane), both of which we were shown. In the same damp heath we found dozens more Marsh Gentians, *Salix aurita* (Eared Willow), *Menyanthes trifoliata* (Bogbean), *Pedicularis palustris* (Marsh Lousewort), two different insectivorous *Utricularia* (Bladderwort) species, *Osmunda regalis* (Royal Fern), *Oenanthe fistulosa* (Tubular Water-dropwort), and *Eleogiton fluitans* (Floating Club-rush). Finally, *Ranunculus novae-forestae* (New Forest Crowfoot), with five or more lobed leaves was identified, growing with *Ranunculus omiophyllus* (Round-leaved Crowfoot).

A very memorable day superbly led and carefully planned: many thanks to Sharon

David Pickering



Marsh Clubmoss



Round-leaved Crowfoot (left) and
New Forest Crowfoot (right)

Sunday 19 September
2010

A Moth Morning with Barbara Last

As I am becoming rather decrepit in my ninth decade, I am less able to take part in active botanising. However, I have been able to amuse myself for the last few years taking an interest in the insects that occur in my garden. I have acquired a moth trap consisting of an actinic lamp which lures night flying insects, mainly moths, towards it, from which they fall into a box beneath. If I run the trap all night, there is usually a nice collection of creatures to examine at leisure in the morning. Then most are usually comatose and easily handled. In the last few years I have had over three hundred species of moths. This year so far I have had a hundred and ninety. I have also had hornets, ichneumons and a variety of beetles including very smelly sexton beetles fresh from a corpse.

At the September meeting, eight members came to see what had dropped in. There were over seventy Large Yellow Underwings whose larvae feed

If I run the trap all night, there is usually a nice collection of creatures to examine at leisure in the morning



Green Carpet - Barbara Last

on a variety of plants. There were about twenty Setaceous Hebrew Characters which has an amusing sobriquet, so called after an old bewhiskered Jewish entomologist. Victorian naturalists conjured up most of these names, out on Sunday outings. We also had several Common Wainscots, numerous Lunar Underwings and Common Rustics, rather dull undistinguished creatures. The prettiest was a Burnished brass that really does have a metallic shine. We had a tiny Green Carpet and a Pink-barred Sallow. I am surprised we did not get more of the Sallow family as these are in flight at this season. They mostly look like gold and yellow willow leaves, turning at this time. They breed now and lay eggs on willow and poplar catkins on which the larvae feed in spring. Altogether we had seventeen species. I may have misinformed the group about

Heart and Darts, as they are not in flight now

We were fortunate in choosing that night, as it was mild, windless and overcast. On a cold clear moonlight night, nothing comes to the trap and not surprisingly they don't fly in windy wet weather much.

Barbara Last

Christopher Perraton

Sadly, we lost one of the Botanical Society's true "originals" when Christopher died on 23 March this year. He and Mollie were tetrad recorders for the Wiltshire Flora (published in 1993), and then went on to become founder members of the Wiltshire Botanical Society. Christopher joined the BotSoc committee in 1997. As warden of Morgan's Hill for the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, he showed us the delights of the site on many occasions, including a wealth of geological information along with the botany.

Earlier, he collaborated in the rewriting of the constitution of the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes and was involved in setting up the Biological Record Centre within the museum. More recently, he worked as a volunteer in the BRC's more present incarnation within the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.



Pink-barred Sallow - Barbara Last



*Molly and Christopher sheltering in the rain.
BotSoc Abergavenny trip, June 2003*

Crossword

Food For Free

This time we concentrate on any plant that can be used as food. If you have a copy of Richard Mabey's popular book then it may be easier....

Across

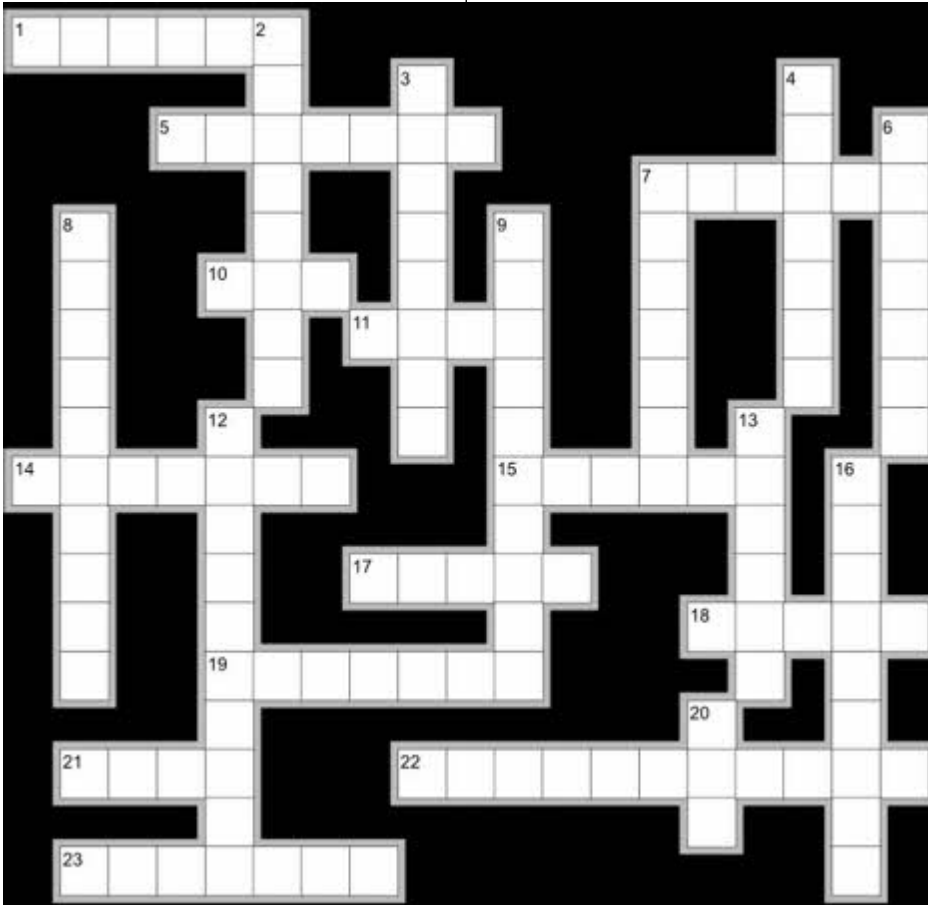
1. Aniseed odour and on the Wiltshire Rare Plant Register
5. Essential flavouring for gin
7. Commonly found floating in Pimms
10. Flavours beer

11. A must for a type of gin
14. Relative of Goatsbeard and a tasty root
15. No sting in this soup
17. Makes a good wine but its leaves smell of mice
18. *Chrysanthemum vulgare*
19. Garlic smell it a mile off in woods
21. Flowers of this plant are used in Tilleul
22. Now made with starch, gelatine and sugar
23. Combine with dandelion for a drink

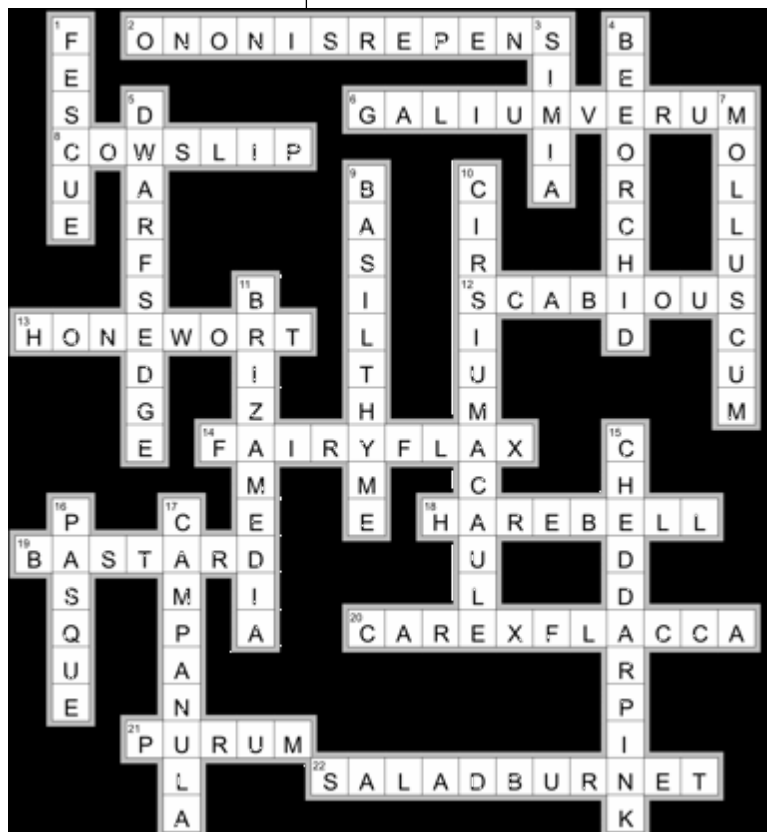
Down

2. *Pulmonaria officinalis*
3. *Eryngium maritimum*
4. Over 400 micro-species - hope you identified which one when you picked them this autumn
6. *Crambe maritima*
7. Essential in dock pudding
8. Up North the roots would be chewed like liquorice
9. *Smyrniolus olustratum*
12. An apparent cooling liner in boots
13. Its fruits need to be half-rotten or 'bletted'
16. Or Marsh Samphire
20. Its acorns can be used to make coffee

by Tim Kaye



Answers to Tim's previous crossword, "Calcicolous", in Newsletter 35



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Tim Kaye	Treasurer and Membership, web site	07980 863 577	timdankaye@hotmail.com
Pat Woodruffe	Meetings Secretary	01794 884436	pmw.bentley@waitrose.com

Winter Meetings

We are trying a new type of meeting this winter - a walk, followed by a pub lunch and then an afternoon talk at a nearby member's house.

- Sunday 14 Nov 2010 Westbury Hill Walk, pub lunch, illustrated talk on Transylvania by Pat Woodruffe
- Saturday 4 Dec 2010 Talk "Beetles and Plants", Michael Darby
- Saturday 15 Jan 2011 Workshop "Getting up to date with Stage 3", Sharon Pilkington
- Saturday 12 Feb 2011 Grovelly and Ebsbury walk, Pub Lunch, talk on Namaqualand by Barbara Last
- Saturday 5 March 2011 AGM to be followed by 'Memories of South Yorkshire in 2010'
- Wed 16 March 2011 Walk in Great Yews, Coombe Bissett, pub lunch
- Sunday 27 March 2011 Walk in Savernake Forest arboretum, talk "Venerable trees of Savernake", Joan Davies
- Sunday 10 April 2011 Porton Down, Counting Juniper bushes

For details, see our meetings leaflet or the Wiltshire Botanical Society web site at <http://www.wiltsbotsoc.co.uk>

You can download this newsletter (and other recent newsletters) *in colour* from <http://www.southwilts.com/site/WBS/Newsletters.htm>

Future meetings

Tell us how you like this winter's "walk, pub, talk" meetings. What other meetings would you like? Contact Pat Woodruffe by writing to:

Anchorsholme, Hop Gardens
Whiteparish, Nr. Salisbury
Wilts SP5 2ST

or by phone or e-mail (01794 884436,
pmw.bentley@waitrose.com)

Cover picture: Early Spider Orchid, Pat Woodruffe

Editors Corner

Thank you to all the people who played their part in producing this newsletter by sending in reports on our field meetings.

Tim Kaye's crossword is on wild food this time. You really will find "Food for Free" is a help. He has also sent the solution for the previous crossword on calcicolous plants.

Do you have a favourite site which you would encourage members to visit? Could you write a short article about it for the newsletter? Include a photo or photos if you can.

Please send any items for this winter's newsletter (issue 37) by early April 2011. Post to Richard Aisbitt, 84 Goddard Avenue, Swindon, Wilts SN1 4HT, or email to richard@theaisbitts.co.uk

Other News

As ever, "British Wildlife" continues to publish fascinating articles. Take a look at Andy Byfield's sobering "Is nature conservation working for plants?"

Sharon Pilkington's annual reports about plant life in Wiltshire can be found at: <http://www.wsbrc.org.uk/YourRecords/CountyRecorder/plantandfern/PageTemplate.aspx>

Membership

We welcome new members, beginners and experts alike. If you are interested, please feel free to come to a meeting or two before you commit yourself. Subscriptions and contact details go to:

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Subscriptions:

Ordinary Member	£10.00 per year
Joint Membership	£15.00 per year
Life Membership	£100 (Family £150)