



# NEWSLETTER

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## WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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Saturday May 4th 2002, morning

## Visit to North Meadow, Cricklade

**Leaders: Nicky Hoban and Geoff Perrott**

Twenty-five members assembled at the entrance to the meadow for a tour conducted by the temporary warden Geoff Perrott and the permanent voluntary warden Nicky Hoban. There was still a sprinkling of *Fritillaria meleagris* though, because of the early spring, not the purple haze we had hoped for. Though from South Africa, Geoff was very well briefed to tell us of the history and management of the meadow. The Court Leat has been in existence for 800-900 years and meets annually. Horses and cattle are allowed to graze between August 12th and February 12th and the hay crop is sold to local farmers, who cut it after July 1st. The hay plots are marked by old boundary stones; fourteen of the fifteen plots belong to English Nature

The meadow covers an area of 108 acres between the rivers Thames and Churn and contains 85% of the British population of fritillaries. It is likely that the winter flooding has a negative effect on the grasses which enables fritillaries to flourish. The seed floats and, once germinated, takes from eight to twelve years to produce flowers. The young plants have from one to 8 leaves and are easily distinguished from grass



because they feel much stronger. Some of the many popular names for fritillaries are Bloody Warrior, Widows' Weep, Drooping Bells of Sodom and Oaksey Lily. They were first recorded at Cricklade in 1754.

There were good patches of Cuckooflower, *Cardamine pratensis*, and Marsh Marigold, *Caltha palustris*, in the damp flushes, and elsewhere Cowslips, *Primula veris*, Common Comfrey, *Symphytum Officinale*, Red Deadnettle, *Lamium purpureum*, Dandelions, *Taraxacum officinale*, Red Clover, *Trifolium pratense*, Meadow Buttercup, *Ranunculus acris*, including one with tiny distorted petals, and Adder's Tongue Fern, *Ophioglossum vulgatum* with the spathe just visible. Hawthorn was already in bloom, including Midland Thorn, *Crataegus laevigata* alongside the familiar *C. monogyna*. We also saw the leaves of Pepper Saxifrage, *Silaum silaus*, and Meadow Rue, *Thalictrum flavum*. Birds seen or heard were wren, skylark, heron, Reed Bunting, Swans and Sedge Warblers.

*Gillian King*



**Saturday May 4th 2002, afternoon**  
**BARNSLEY WARREN**

**Leader: Barbara Last**

A slightly larger group convened in the afternoon intent on viewing Pasque Flower, *Pulsatilla vulgaris*. We soon found a scattering of seed heads, and then some plants still in bloom, but over a wide area and nowhere in concentration. The cameras came out, as did the hand lenses as a ring of bottoms surrounded a tiny geranium, which we did not manage to identify.



There was a fine patch of Green-winged Orchids, *Orchis morio*, including several pale pink examples, at

the bottom of the slope, and a few more, among a large group of Early Purple Orchids, *O. mascula*, higher up the slope, with a group of contented botanists resting in the sunshine amongst them.

Many of the familiar downland plants were in bloom, among them Field Madder, *Sherardia arvensis*, Field Forget-me-not, *Myosotis arvensis*, Kidney Vetch, *Anthyllis vulneraria*, Salad Burnett, *Sanguisorbia minor*, Chalk Milkwort, *Polygala calcarea*, Thyme-leaved Speedwell, *Veronica serpyllifolia*, and Parsley-piert, *Aphanes arvensis*. The latter, though apparently common, has tiny green flowers, which were difficult to see even with a lens, and is possibly often overlooked.

At least one Buzzard flew overhead, and Siskins were sighted along the hedgerow at the far end of the reserve. The combination of opportunities to see two of our rarest flowers, in pleasant company and fine weather made the day most enjoyable.

*Gillian King*



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**Wednesday 22nd May and Tuesday**  
**6th August 2002**

**Bedwyn Brail**

**Leaders: Jack Oliver and Joy Newton**

Bedwyn Brail is a wooded area south of Great Bedwyn, and southeast of Savernake Forest and Marlborough. The owner, Richard Charles, had asked for a plant survey of his property. There were eleven attenders for the formally organised meeting of 22.05.2002. We split into three groups, Northern, Middle and Southern. The area had 17 ponds, scattered throughout the three sections, with marshy areas, emergent aquatics and open water.



*Greater Butterfly Orchid - photo Joan Davies*

varied picnic provided by Richard on the site of a Roman Villa, giving us the impetus to continue through the afternoon with plant identifications. The May meeting achieved 213 vascular species and two types of Charophyte.

Richard asked Joy Newton to organise a second meeting later in the year to identify the later summer species in the same area. This time there were eight attenders, and we split into a north and a south team. It was sunny and very pleasant, and Joy listed a number of butterfly and dragonfly species. Two of the ponds had huge masses of an unfamiliar Charophyte, *Nitella opaca* (*N. flexilis* aggr.). This plant has some of the biggest living cells in the entire plant kingdom; even with the naked eye, these could be seen to be 1mm wide and up to 10 or 20cm long, or even longer.

The *Nitella* was the third Charophyte taxon. 39 more vascular plant species were found, giving a total of 252 taxa for the two meetings. This total includes four orchid species and Meadow Saffron.

*Jack Oliver*

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After the morning's work, we were treated to a richly



*Betty Gentry's 'Lodge Lower Barn'*

Saturday 1st June

## High Clear Down

Leader: Joy Newton

On Saturday June 1, 2002 Joy Newton led a party of 29 members of the Wiltshire Botanical Society and the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society to High Clear Down especially to see the Early Gentians (*Gentianella anglica*), which we found flower in various locations on the hillside, together with Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Chalk Milkwort (*Polygala calcarea*), Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) and Wild Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*). We also saw Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) and Dwarf Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*). Among the grasses were Red Fescue



Early Gentian (*gentianella anglica*)  
High Clear Down, 2km West of Aldbourne  
1st June, 2002

Photo: Joan Davies

(*Festuca rubra*), Smooth Meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*) and Lesser Quaking-grass (*Briza minor*).

We enjoyed a warm sunny day, which brought out several butterflies, including a Small Tortoiseshell, Speckled Wood, Large White and several Small Whites. The hospitality we received from Betty Gentry at Dudmore Lodge Farm when we returned hot and thirsty in the afternoon was much appreciated.

Phillida Sneyd

Saturday 8 June 2002

## Great Cheverell Hill

Led by the warden, Nigel Cope

To pay a visit to Great Cheverell Hill is to feel that you have gone to sleep in our day-to-day world of herbicides, insecticides and flowerless pastures and woken up amongst the glories of Elysian Fields. The challenge was not so much to identify the flower, as to make sure that, having identified it; you didn't stand on it or its neighbour. The stems of flowers and grasses were thick on the ground and, as we looked, Adonis blues fluttered past with the "shimmering" flight that is so characteristic and skylarks serenaded overhead.



*Sainfoin*

Our leader was Nigel Cope, the warden for the area and someone who clearly not only knew his patch but who radiated enthusiasm about the finds there and the data he has been able to collect over some twenty-five years of recording. Not only did Nigel know about the flowers and the birds, but observation over this period had also taught him a thing or two about "badgers' poo" and the effect that the badgers' clearly-defined latrines



*A battered Marsh Fritillary*

have on the soil: in essence a darkening and fertilising effect from dung which is full of seeds, and a subsequent blooming of plants from the favoured yellow rattle which badgers relish.

Nigel explained the status of Great Cheverell Hill and, in so doing, highlighted the ways in which the existence and future of such sites are so fragile. Technically, the area is not a reserve and is not managed. Nigel's task is one of persuasion, education and co-operation – the area comes under the jurisdiction of the military authorities who have also taken over the farms on the site. Part of the warden's work thus involves discussions with farmers about optimum times for grazing and moving cattle. Whilst a white warden's landrover was to be seen patrolling during our visit, the warden's authority was minimal. This made proposals for the fencing of the site by the military authorities all the more desirable, particularly since the presence of private vehicles using the site as a dirt track was only too apparent.

Our visit was uplifting despite these intruding indicators of gloom and soon the south-facing hillside which we were led to was covered with group members alternately picking their way gingerly amongst the plants and kneeling down prayerfully as yet another choice specimen came to light. We soon realised that Nigel's introductory prognosis that we would be seeing "Burnt tips by the thousand" was not just another creative way of exaggerating. Within half an hour one member straightened her back, gazed solemnly around and declared, "There are literally *hundreds* of orchids here!" only to be followed by the comments of another observer who had totted up seven different orchid species, with Burnt Tip Orchids arguably at the top of the list.

There were, as on any really good visit, plenty of opportunities both to wield the field guide and to demonstrate the benefits of learning on the spot. Keys by Rose and Dace were soon joined by texts on grasses and butterflies and the thus the keen amateur could soon pick up tips. Looking at the parallel pollinia of *Platanthera bifolia* and thus distinguishing them from the diverging pollinia of *Platanthera chlorantha* was one such exercise.

Species found: Bee orchid, Burnt-tipped orchid, Greater and Lesser Butterfly orchid, Pyramidal orchid, Common Spotted orchid, Fragrant orchid, Sainfoin, Bladder Campion, Quaking Grass, Tall Fescue, Cowslip, Meadow Fescue, Bird's-Foot Trefoil, Fairy Flax, Salad Burnet, Milkwort (Chalk and Common), Yellow Wort, Horse-shoe vetch, Daisy, Carlina Thistle, Mouse-ear Hawkweed, Bastard toadflax, Early gentian, Yellow rattle, Clustered Bellflower, Goatsbeard, Twayblade, Crested Dog's Tail, Upright Broom, Lady's Bedstraw, Hedge Bedstraw, Thyme, Hoary Plantain, Ox-eye Daisy, Hop Trefoil, Star of Bethlehem, Woolly Thistle, Hairy Violet.

*Brenda Child*

**Sunday June 16, 2002**

## Clouts Wood

**Led by the Warden, Richard Aisbitt.**

The first half of June this year was rather below par and certainly when fourteen of us gathered at Clouts Wood the sky was grey and lowering. This did not deter us as Richard led us through the wood and showed us its highlights.

It is an ancient woodland on a fairly steep slope and has a variety of habitats ranging from wetland at the lower level to a coppiced hazel area at the top. The trees are broadleaved, mainly ash and oak.

The woodland floor consisted of well-known plants such as Dog's Mercury, Herb Bennet, Bluebells, Tufted Hair Grass and Rough Meadow Grass with its strange woodland habit.

In the lower boggy land we saw the Lesser Water Parsnip growing in an old neglected watercress bed and nearby was some young growth of the Giant Horsetail. In a ditch which drained a nearby airfield was a superb example of a Soft Shield Fern which looked tropical in its exuberance! It obviously enjoyed the moist conditions and the shaded situation in which it was growing. At the bottom of the slopes we were shown the coarse, toothed foliage of the Green Hellebore whilst not far away was a clump of Herb Paris with its parasol-like whorl of obovate leaves.

Walking through the wood we passed the dying leaves of the Autumn Crocus, with its heavy seed cases, and the clear green foliage of wood vetch with its distinctive crown-like stipules, but it was too early for the flowers.



*Oenantholobos pinnatifida*

Throughout the wood we had glimpses of the plant we all wanted to see - the Bath Asparagus or the Spiked Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*) but it was at the very top that that we found it growing in abundance surrounded by a deer fence. The strong stem appears to shoot straight out of the ground and stood about 24" tall. The creamy flowers were just beginning to open and the green stripe was clearly visible on the unopened buds. It was a delightful sight and we had had an enthralling morning.

Rita Grose



Art work - Rita Grose

23 -26 June 2002

## Kingcombe Centre

**“We were botanising” : “What a funny thing to do”**

21 Members were welcomed to the Kingcombe Centre with tea and scrumptious cakes before Adele took us round the grounds to see the fowl (for eggs only) and pigs (Henrietta very talkative but not for eating), the vegetable garden with a “weeds only” compost heap, a wildlife garden with pond, moorhen and chicks (not seen), whirligig beetles and, next morning, a kingfisher. Sheep and lambs, a glazed hide by the river, a rookery and otter spraints reported. Elecampane *Inula helenium*, a corky fruited water dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* 3' high in the garden but only dwarf in the meadows of the adjacent Dorset Wildlife Trust Kingcombe Farm. We also saw pepper saxifrage *Silva silaus*, common spotted orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Scaly male fern *Dryopteris affinis* Ssp. *borreri* by a stream, musk thistle *Cirsium nutans* and a need to turn back in time for our three-course dinner. After which Barbara Last showed us another selection of her superb slides starting with Fibonacci spirals.



Simon Young prepares for rain - but will he fly?

When the Dartford warbler made the right noises and flew away low over the heath or the rare Southern Blue Damsel fly was found mating we became general wildlife enthusiasts. But most of the time the party was on its knees, lenses, reversed binoculars or digital cameras at the ready, identifying recording and enjoying the flora.

## Monday 24 June 2002.

Told to assemble in the Dorchester North car park, which was full, but after much arm waving we found Kevin Cook who was to be our guide for the day. He directed us to a **P** whose symbol was half in the sea at Abbotsbury but proved to be on land bounded by a tamarisk hedge. We scrunched up to the top of Chesil Beach, displacing stones but no scaly crickets and walked east. Plants here have to be halophytes and resistant to the grinding of the stones: Sea Campion *Silene uniflora*, for example, with its spreading colonies, flowering ten months a year, that can desiccate and recover, sea kale or cabbage *Crambe maritima*, sea pea *Lathyrus japonicus*. Descending to the back of the beach there was a level strip between it and a *Phragmites* swamp where a pair of stonechats



Barbara Last and Sea Kale *Crambe maritima*

were nesting. Scentless mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum*, toothed medick *Medicago polymorpha*, a fescue *Vulpia* sp. (sea) hard grass *Parapholis strigosa*, buck's horn plantain *Plantago coronopus*, sea plantain *Plantago maritima*, sea arrow grass *Triglochin maritimum*, bird's-foot clover (fenugreek) *Trifolium ornithopodioides*, rough clover *Trifolium scabrum*, greater spurrey *Spergularia media*, sea purslane *Atriplex portulacoides*, frosted orache *Atriplex laciniata*, creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, wild celery *Apium graveolens*, bladder campion *Silene vulgaris*, bristly ox tongue *Picris echioides*, wild parsnip *Pastinaca sativa*, NOT alexanders *Smyrniolus sativum*, common fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* and a veritable hedge of shrubby sea blite *Suaeda fruticosa*. As we approached The Fleet marsh turned to water, a wartime row of tanks traps plus metal fencing prevented further access that would have disturbed the birds. But we did see little terns that were said to be nesting, Canada geese, cormorants and, of course, Abbotsbury swans.

Lunch on the grassy bank of the **P**. On by car, taking in a lay by with splendid view of the length of the tombola to Portland and patronising a convenient ice cream van. So to Lyre for a section of the beach with even smaller stones, one patch inexplicably darker than the rest, for a wonderful array of yellow horned poppies *Glaucium flavum* and more huge sea kale, tree

-mallow *Lavatera arborea* with a mallow *Malva* below which allowed comparison of the two species' epicalyces, wild onion *Allium vineale*, perennial sow-thistle *Sonchus arvensis*. English scurvygrass *Cochlearia anglica*

By car to Valley of the Stones Reserve. Over a stile to a hilltop of gorse and bracken, bristle bent *Agrostis curtisii*, lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, green-ribbed sedge *Carex binervis* seething with young ticks that had to be brushed off and a body search made before dinner, betony *Stachys officinalis*, silver hair-grass *Aira caryophylla*. Some descended to the Valley of Stones, variously sandstone and others a flint conglomerate, all said to have washed down in periglacial times and admired the lichens, slender parsley-piert *Aphanes inexpectata*. A pond at the top held the minute ivy-leaved crowfoot *Ranunculus hederaceus*.

After dinner Simon showed us a TV recording of the Phillips' Home Covert, a fascinating reminder of our visit last year. Also Ivan Randall and Marjorie Waters in the lovely churchyard at Kington St Michael, which they help to look after. Pat reviewed the programme for next year and invited ideas.

## Tuesday 25 June 2002

A grid reference was easier to find for Stoborough Heath Nature Reserve where Rees Cox was waiting with a key to let us park off the road on a rabbit grazed sward between gorse bushes, birds foot *Ornithopus perpusillus* exquisite under a lens, hare's-foot, slender and lesser trefoils *Trifolium arvense*, *T. micranthum* and *T. dubium*, common vetch *Vicia sativa* Ssp. *sativa*,



Hare's-foot Clover, *Trifolium arvense*

spring vetch *Vicia lathyroides*, small cudweed *Filago minima*. Slowly up the hill to see to the north a forest of masts at a marina on Poole Harbour and to the south the hills with Corfe Castle on a mound in a notch. On this acid soil, which had been cultivated but since reverted to heath were three gorses: European, dwarf and western *Ulex europaeus*, *U. minor* and *U. gallii*, heather (ling) *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and, as we went down to the bog, cross leaved



heath *Erica tetralix* and Dorset heath *Erica ciliaris*. Purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea* with its characteristic leaf colour. heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*. Two sika deer *Cervus nippon nippon*, silver studded blue butterfly *Plebejus argus*, common field grasshopper *Chorthippus brunneus* and later a large crane fly with beautifully patterned wings and a wolf spider carrying young. Dodder *Cuscuta epithymum*. deer grass *Trichophorum cespitosum*. *Sphagnum* bog wet to the knees of photographers. Bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, round and oblong leaved sundews *Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. intermedia*, pale butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*, star sedge *Carex echinata*, a crane fly *Tipula maxima*. cotton grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, hoary ragwort *Senecio erucifolius*, bog myrtle *Myrica gale*, welted thistle *Carduus crispus*. Some thought the next interest was to be a *Gladiolus* after a five-mile hike. In reality, after some 500 yards (456 m) it proved to be a minute allseed *Radiola linoides* beside which someone had placed a shilling (5 new pence) piece as a scale. Centaury *Centaurium erythraea*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, lesser skullcap *Scutellaria minor*, marsh St John's wort *Hypericum elodes*, a pondweed *Potamogeton* sp.

A steep short cut up eroded sand of the two steps up one slide back brought us unexpectedly to the cars and lunch.

Across the road onto Hartland Moor to a pool, made larger for fire fighting, to find lesser water-plantain *Baldellia rapunculoides*, pillwort *Pilularia globulifera* a fern "could be mistaken only for an angiosperm" - Stace, burnet rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*. A pair of southern blue damselflies *Coenagrion* sp. mating



Edwin Carter finds a dragonfly

That evening Barbara entertained us with a selection of non-botanical slides.

### Wednesday 26 June 2002

Louisa led us unhurriedly through other parts of the Kingcombe Farm.

Bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, oval sedge *Carex ovalis*, and lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*. marsh

violet *Viola palustris*, slender marsh-bedstraw *Gallium constrictum*, sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, marsh cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum*, buck's-horn plantain *Plantago coronopus*. Plus lots more but we had to go home.

An interesting and pleasurable three days. Thank you Joy for arranging it.

Mollie and Christopher Perraton

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Saturday 6 July 2002

## Colerne Park and Monks Wood

Leader: Ivan Randall

Nine of us met at Biddestone Church and proceeded in two cars on a metalled road, Weavern Lane, one mile south-westwards to Grid point ST849718, a timber logging point. We then walked west on a metalled byway with lush summer vegetation closing in for about 1/3 mile, then diverted along a footpath with nice views of the wooded valley, to a point where a side stream and track from Pickwick Farm came in. On a shelf above the flood plain was the abandoned Weavern Farm to our right. A modern concrete farm bridge over the Bybrook took us to the bottom of a steep climb west north west in the woods with a set aside field to the left and steep drop with straggly rotten trees down to the river to our right.

The dominant vegetation was the very smelly remains of Ramsons and this continued on the more level track along the hillside. We found Spiked Star of Bethlehem and it was a relief to wade through Dogs Mercury for a change. Ivan showed us his snails. I was told that a large skeletal plant was the remains of Stinking Hellebore. Fortunately, the molluscs had left alone a magnificent clump of Herb Paris nearby. On a more open crossway we found Pyramidal Orchids, the remains of other orchids, Toadflax, Knapweed and Hemp Agrimony.

We found a wonderful unimproved sunny meadow facing east with a peaceful view across the valley towards Biddestone (a shame about the electric gridline). We sat and enjoyed a snack amongst Yellow Wort, Thyme, Fairy Flax, Rest Harrow, bedstraws, Eyebright, Quaking Grass, Centaury, Salad Burnet, Glaucous Sedge, Goats Beard, Scabious, Woolly Thistle, Tufted Vetch, Marjoram and remains of Butterfly Orchid, violets, Cowslips, and Water Mint. There was *Geranium columbinum* in a drainage channel. We saw a White-feathered Moth and Marbled White butterflies.

On the return through the wood we had to push by 8-foot high burdocks. Back on the footpath to the byway, a badger had relieved itself beside the path.

My memories are of vast swathes of blue Geraniums across Salisbury Plain, the patriotic Jubilee displays of Shrewton and Tilshead, pretty villages on the sandstone and of the photogenic Biddescombe on the limestone, of the Kennet and Avon canal and my lunch in a farm gateway with a sweet smell of Oil-seed Rape drifting across.

Sadly, we did not see the advertised Wild Pears.

Edwin Carter

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Saturday 6th July 2002

## Snails – a General Overview and Species Encountered at Colerne Park and World

It may not often be recognised what part molluscs have to play. There are several ways in which they contribute to the lives of other species. The way the Song Thrush uses an anvil for smashing snail shells is probably one of the most familiar. Various water birds such as waders and ducks feed on aquatic molluscs, and hedgehogs, mice and shrews include terrestrial molluscs in their diet.

Some beetles such as the glow-worm predate on molluscs in its larval and adult form. There is also an entire family of snail killing flies, the *Sciomyzidae*, with 65 species in Britain. The larvae are specialised parasites and predators of snails and slugs and aquatic pea shells. Various other types of flies include species that specialise on living or dead molluscs. The larva of a chironomid midge lives inside the mantle cavity of the shell of freshwater mussels. Also some *Osmia* and *Hoplitis* species of solitary bees nest inside empty



*The Round-mouthed snail, Pomatias elegans*

snails' shells on grassland.

Most people are familiar with the garden snail *Helix aspersa*, the Brown Lipped Banded snail *Cepaea nemoralis*, and the White Lipped Banded snail *Cepaea hortensis*, possibly a few other species as well. The



*A Door Snail, Clausilia bidentata*

majority of us have collected a few of the banded shells and marvelled at the range of colours.

Most land snail species are small in comparison with these, as the adult shells are less than 10mm across. They still have some conservation value even if the casual walker often overlooks them. Any conservationist should include the group as part of the total when considering management and classification of wildlife sites.

The importance of molluscs as indicator species needs to be recognised, as they are sensitive to disturbance. Ploughing of grassland, clearing of woodland, and altering water tables will affect the mollusc's diversity. Hence, the history of land use may be assessed from species present, as they are poor at recolonisation and dispersal.

They also act as good environmental monitoring agents because many species are sensitive to pollution. The conservation of present day mollusc fauna assists the interpretation of the fossil mollusc fauna, which relates to historic changes in vegetation and land use since the Iron Age. Molluscs have evolved a major role in the natural balance of certain habitats. In particular they dispose of large quantities of dead plant material in the process producing animal protein and returning plant nutrients to the soil.

In Wiltshire, we are lucky there are still sites of conservation value with a good variety of mollusc species. Colerne Park is one. Although, like every branch of the animal kingdom, there are pest species that man seeks to control, the smaller rarer species do no harm at all to mankind. Colerne Park being ancient woodland is a productive habitat, although some unimproved downlands have a relatively rich molluscan fauna.

Calcareous or base rich soils provide the most favourable conditions. The majority of species occur in valley bottoms and lowland situations where the climate is warmer and the soil richer.

In Britain there are about 50 snail species identifiable in the field using shell size, shape and pattern as a guide. The "umbilicus", the hole in the centre of the whorl on the underside, is also an important diagnostic feature.

The snails we encountered on our visit to Colerne Park were typical of the site. The Round-mouthed snail, *Pomatias elegans*, is one of only two prosobranch species. It has a thick strong shell, greyish or brownish, a handsome snail. Sensitive to climate change it also has a horny plate to cover the mouth of the shell when at rest. Several snails climb trees to browse on lichens and mosses and to regulate their temperature. We saw the Brown-Lipped Banded snail (*Cepaea nemoralis*) and the smaller White-Lipped Banded snail (*Cepaea hortensis*) also the much smaller spindle shaped Door Snail (*Clausilia bidentata*). Amongst the ride-side vegetation we found the globular Kentish Snail (*Monacha cantiana*) with a distinctive area of brown on the shell lip. Also the Smooth Snail (*Aegopinella nitidula*) which has a waxy appearance to its shell and the Strawberry Snail (*Trichia striolata*) a widespread snail with a white peripheral band, a pest species on fruit crops, as its name suggests, also *Arianata arbustorum*, the Copse Snail, with a handsome brown flecked shell

Finally, during our tea break on the open meadowland, we saw the characteristic Wrinkled Snail (*Candidula intersecta*) with its flecked shell and distinctive growth bands and in the damper areas the Amber Snail (*Succinea putris*) - fairly widespread.

Other snails have been recorded on this SSSI although on this visit they were unseen.

I hope this may stimulate people to look for molluscs when doing botanical recording. Although mild wet days are probably best, snails can be found in damper corners and throughout the year their empty shells give evidence of past existence.

Ivan Randle

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**Saturday 13th July 2002**

## Rubus at Savernake Forest

Alan Newton, the BSBI referee for the genus, joined a select group of WBS Rubus enthusiasts. First stop was by Thornhill Nursery where two closely related species *R. echinatus* and *R. echinoides* (ser. *Radulae*) could be seen. The former has pink flowers and a hairy stem, the latter has white flowers and a glabrous stem, but a plant growing there which had

white flowers and a hairy stem confused even the experts. The party quickly moved on to the arboretum, where clumps of brambles grew around the base of the specimen trees. Here one of the specialities of Savernake, *R. fuscicaulis* (ser. *Radulae*), was growing along with another forest species: *R. sciocharis* (ser. *Sylvatici*). In the open area that had until recently been earmarked for management as woodland pasture, *R. boudicca* (ser. *Rhamnifolii*) was confirmed as new for Vc 7. The leader had spotted this the previous autumn. There was an unsuccessful search nearby on Great Lodge Drive for *R. hylophilus* (ser. *Discolores*) in its only Wiltshire locality. Further along the drive *R. trichodes* (ser. *Micantes*) was confirmed as new to Vc 7: this had also been noticed the previous year. The party now travelled along Grand Avenue to the entrance of the forest where an outlying colony of *R. cantianus* (ser. *Radulae*) was inspected. As its name suggests, its headquarters is in Kent but it has been long known in Wiltshire and was listed in Grose's flora under the name '*R. prionodontus*'. A stop was then made on the White Road to see *R. adenoleucus* (sect. *Corylifolii*), *R. hylocharis* (series *Hystrices*) and *R. pallidus* (series *Radulae*) before lunch at the picnic area. After lunch the party had a stroll round its edges to see *R. surrejanus* (series *Vestiti*) and *R. glareosus* (series *Micantes*). At this point WBS members had more than enough new names and plants to contend with so they thanked the leaders and bid farewell. Messrs. Randall and Newton, having had their appetites whetted, made one last stop near the site of the long vanished Clench Common near Martinsell. Here they were rewarded with 2nd Vc 7 records for both *R. boudicca* and *R. trichodes*, and new colonies of *R. adenoleucus* and the unnamed form listed in Grose's flora as '*R. badius*'.

Rob Randall

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**Saturday 20th July**

## Porton Down

**Leader: Trevor Marks**

On arrival at Porton Down car park I was greeted with the news that we were unable to visit the 'normal' area allowed for botanising and that we had to make do with an alternative. What did this mean, a visit to the local recreation park? Far from it; the leaders for the day, Trevor Marks and his wife led a group of 22 visitors to a beautiful short 'mown' landscape of mauve and yellow flowers.

For one used to the landscape of hay meadows, even the recently cut fields at Clattinger were not as shorn as this one; which seemingly as far as the eye could see was only a couple of inches high. It gave rise to Richard to wonder how many rabbits it took to create and maintain such a close sward.

Birds-foot Trefoil, Autumn Hawkbit, Thyme and Selheal abounded to create the colour effect but the sward

contained a lot more. Plants here have to cope with very thin soils, low moisture, grazing and exposure and this has noticeable effects on those plants normally associated with meadows. Ladies Bedstraw for instance, grew here in low mats with flowers reaching perhaps 3" whereas in meadows they can reach 18" or more.

Walking closer to a wood we were informed that the trees and the surrounding vegetation grew on a clay cap over the chalk giving rise to a different spread of plants and here were found Agrimony, Red Bartsia, Wild Parsnip and Common Centaury.

The verge at the edge of a track provided great interest and an excellent choice for Cranesbill ID as in one small clump grew three species; Long-stalked, Cut-leaved and Dove's-foot Cranesbill.

Further along entering tree cover we were greeted with an unusual white flowered Herb Robert. Another interest was an oak tree with all its secondary growth completely red similar to that of the garden *Photinia* x 'Red Robin'. Soils over chalk generally lack nutrients and this tree probably showed signs of potassium shortage.

An excellent find on a ride at the edge of the wood, by one of the party, was Lesser Centaury, which is a very rare plant in the County. Those waiting their turn to look more closely at it meanwhile debated the differences between Black Medick, which grew abundantly around our feet, and Lesser Trefoil. It was only when it was our turn to stoop that a few plants of the trefoil were found amongst the medick.

After lunch we walked toward scattered bushes of Hawthorn, Buckthorn, Privet and Juniper and here many of us were delighted with Autumn Gentian. We passed through the bushes and downhill to view the vegetation growing on the side of the slopes and in the valley below. Another debate started with pieces of a white flowered bedstraw being lensed but however we tried the conclusion, despite its name, was that it must be Heath Bedstraw; presumably surviving over the chalk because of the clay cap nearby.

In the valley below Harebell and Common Fumitory were found in a disturbed plot of land and a few plants of Burnet-Saxifrage were found nearby but the most important showing to the group was the nationally scarce Dwarf Sedge.

All in all a very good visit; if this was the secondary site, I can't wait to return to see the best.

*Martin Buckland*

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**Thursday 25th July 2002**

## **Clanger Wood and Bratton Castle - Butterfly Outing**

**Leader: Nick Wynne**

This meeting was arranged, like all our field trips, months ago and typically the weather did not look good for butterflies: clouds, quite chilly, but fortunately no rain. Fifteen members met in the car park at Clanger Wood where our guide, Nick Wynne, gave us a short introductory talk about butterflies. Clanger Wood is a SSSI but apparently the butterfly interest has declined in recent years. However there were some butterflies to admire including Silver-washed Fritillary, Ringlet, Large and Green-veined Whites, Meadow Brown, Small Skipper and male and female Gatekeepers. We learnt that Small Skippers and Essex Skippers look very similar but the Small Skipper has orange tips on its antennae whereas the Essex has black tips. The male Gatekeeper is distinguished from the female by the black scent bars on its forewings.

Apart from the butterflies, we identified many woodland plants including Broad-leaved Helleborines and Zig-zag Clover along the main ride. We also saw a small wasp with the pollen from Broad-leaved Helleborine attached to its head.

After our walk through the wood, we piled into our cars for the short journey to the car park near the Bratton White Horse. After eating our packed lunches we set off to try our luck at spotting downland butterflies. The species list was not large but did include Chalkhill Blue, Marbled White and 6-spot Burnet moths. We also saw Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell and lots of Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars on nettles near the castle.

Pyramidal Orchid, Knapweed Broomrape and Harebell were noted as well as Marsh Woundwort in one of the ditches.

A vote of thanks to Nick for leading the walks. I'm sorry we didn't pick a sunnier day for him.

*Jean Wall*

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Thursday 8th August 2002

## Clatford Arboretum – Trees and Water Plants

Leader: Jack Oliver

Fourteen of us found our way to Jack's arboretum, which has the added interest of the River Kennet running through, and once having been a water meadow. Almost the first tree we saw was the unique bipinnate form of Chinese Wingnut, *Pterocarya stenoptera* 'Fernleaf'. Next was a willow which survives both on dry chalk downland, and with its roots in water, *Salix x sericans*, the Broad-leaved Osier, and then Common Osier *S. viminalis* with its narrow slightly under-curved leaves. We met the complicated triple hybrid, very furry, *S. x dasyclados* from Silesia, Poland, and then the Purple Willow *S. purpurea* which is an amazing buttercup-yellow under the stripped bark, and which has purple and yellow catkins. This tree can have opposite and alternate leaves on the same tree. There followed White Willow, Crack Willow, and then Bay Willow, *S. pentandra* (5 stamens), a native tree which deserves to be planted more often, and also Olive, Violet and Cricket Bat Willows. It was interesting to see *Sorbus wilmottiana* (one of 16 young trees from seed), perhaps safer in Jack's haven than in the Avon Gorge. Then we saw a few of the poplars – Chinese Necklace Poplar with its very large leaves, Native Black Poplar, and the scented Western Balsam.

We were now introduced to samples of freshwater algae, firstly two filamentous types, *Cladophora* - woolly to the touch, and *Spirogyra* – with a slimy texture. Then *Hildenbrandia*, an alga which stains brown stones brick red. There followed *Verrucaria*, a black underwater lichen which gives a tarry look to stones, and a moss, *Fontinalis antipyretica*, the Greater Water-moss, sometimes up to 3 feet long, with leaves folded like a boat's keel. This was once used in Scandinavian wooden buildings as a fire-retardant, as its Latin name suggests. The Long-beaked Water Feather-moss *Rhynchostegium riparioides* survives in all water levels and can even dry out completely. A third water moss was Smaller Water Lattice-moss *Cinclidotus fontinaloides*. Watery liverworts included *Pellia endiviifolia*, which looks like a moss with little fingers, *P. epiphylla*, not so divided. My favourite was *Conocephalum conicum*, a scented liverwort which has large hexagonal cells with a pore easily seen with a hand lens in the middle of each cell. Then there was the large *Marchantia polymorpha*, often seen in the greenhouse.

Then Jack showed us the two Water Crowfoots; *Ranunculus peltatus* which grows in the Kennet up to West Overton, and *R. pseudofluitans* ssp. *penicillatus*, which then takes over. Beginners were reminded that speedwells have four petals, whilst forget-me-nots have five. We found *Veronica catenata*, Pink Water Speedwell, *V. anagallis-aquatica*, Blue Water

Speedwell, but *V. lackschewitzii* (*anagallis-aquatica* x *catenata*) the Hybrid Water Speedwell seemed to be more common than the parent species.

On to some emergent monocots – *Phragmites australis*, with bamboo-like stems that hold seed heads all winter. Reed Sweet Grass dies down in winter, has keel-shaped ends to the leaves and a delightful ogee-shaped ligule. Reed Canary Grass has flat leaves, a papery ligule and is similar to 'Gardeners Gaiters' in the garden. Burr-reed has a square stem and leaves heavily keeled with brown tips.

We saw Rigid Hornwort, in which the leaves divide twice and are firm to the touch. Most of us know Hemlock Water-dropwort, but on the Continent it is not so well known and deaths have occurred when visitors have mistaken the leaves for celery or the root for parsnip. We saw a sample of *Crassula helmsii* – New Zealand Pigmy Weed, which can look very different in different situations, and has been found in rock pools by the sea. It can look like Water Starwort or like Stonecrop, depending on the habitat. We handled a Stonewort (*Chara*) to reveal why it is so named, having a gritty feel from the calcium in the water. We also looked at *Nitella*, with its huge long cells. Jack had us well schooled and all the more mentally fit from our morning's exercise. In the afternoon, three Hampshire members of the WBS stayed on to look at more poplar and willow species. Thank you for your work, Jack.

Marjorie Waters

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Saturday 7 September

## Everleigh Ashes

Leader: Rita Grose

Our trip started with a good sighting of three male and two female common blue butterflies on Oxford Ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*). Three Meadow Browns were also in evidence. After viewing the usual species for this time of year, Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*) and Perforate St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), our first plant of note was an unusual small tree identified as the Snowdrop Tree (*Halesia Monticola*).

Our goal was the Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*). We found these in some numbers along the main ride and in a large cluster after a small detour. Fortified by copious blackberries we made our way along the main ride towards a part of the wood where dormouse boxes had been placed. We found along the way Fragrant Agrimony (*Agrimonia procera*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Enchanter's-nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*), Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), Redshank (*Persicaria maculosa*) and Water Pepper (*Persicaria hydropiper*) growing together, Vervain (*Verbena officinalis*) and the beautiful seed pods of Musk-mallow (*Malva moschata*).

Inspection of the dormouse boxes found only slugs and moss but a hornet in a large puddle and a sexton beetle endeavouring to bury a shrew proved interesting diversions.

Apart from the Common Blue butterflies mentioned we saw two more males, two females, and one Red Admiral, one Speckled Wood, and four Meadow Browns.

Many thanks to our leader Rita Grose, who stepped in at the last moment to replace Audrey Summers.

Monica Blake

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6 October 2002

## Fungus Foray, Savernake Forest

**Leaders: Peter Marren and Malcolm Storey**

A total of 23 people, including Sue Everett from British Wildlife, gathered at The Column to hear and see Peter Marren's unfailingly interesting presentation, backed by Malcolm Storey's scrutinies of the more obscure taxa. Notwithstanding the very dry preceding weeks, many species were seen, at least 50 in all.

The edible *Russula ochroleuca*, (Common Yellow Russula or Crumble Cap) was the most prevalent species, but other Russulas such as *R. mairei* (Beechwood Sickener, an important mycorrhizal species) were tested and spat out. Smell as well as taste and touch could all be additional aids to identification, which Peter illustrated particularly with the *Lactarius* (Milk Cap) genus. The smell list included wet laundry, soap, old rubber and bed bugs.

Other genera discussed and demonstrated included *Amanita* (Death Caps), *Daedalopsis* (Blushing Bracket, with some Greek mythology thrown in), *Stereum*, *Bjerkandera*, *Xylaria* (Candle Snuff), *Ustulina*, *Conocybe*, *Clitocybe* (Funnel-caps), *Hypholoma* (Sulphur Tuft), *Marasmius* (Horse-hair Fungus), *Collybia*, *Mycena*, *Oudemansiella* (Porcelain or Poached Egg Fungus), *Coriolus*, *Polyporus* (Dryad's Saddle) and *Pluteus*. *Boletus badius* concentrates caesium, including radioactive caesium from Chernobyl. The great *Ganoderma* (Beech Bracket) can incorporate cellulose and lignin, making it a tough perennial. We also saw a disintegrating Slime Mould (*Myxomycetes* division).

Most of us know about green plants. The increasing impression from these forays into the Fungal Kingdom is that as much or more diversity is to be found here as in the *Plantae*.

Jack Oliver

## Bentley Wood – an update to the meeting in May 2001

Members will recall – I hope – visiting the newly acquired field of 26 acres on the southern edge of the wood. The Trustees were able to buy this long-standing arable field, which links the two southern extremities of the wood, with the aid of a generous Heritage Lottery Grant. Following the completion of the purchase, a Countryside Stewardship Agreement was also successfully negotiated. Concurrently, advice on the conversion of an arable field into a flower-rich meadow was sought. The plan of action submitted by Charles Flower was felt to be most suitable and has been followed. This involved spraying the field with a total herbicide, to reduce the seed bank, in May 2001 and again in 2002 – a plan not agreed without some misgivings by a botanist! During the winter of 2001 some trees were planted at the northern end and in the summer of 2002 the field was ploughed and harrowed ready for planting a mixture of native species in September. In July a series of four scrapes was created, running down a valley to a new large pond. And finally, as I write on a grey, wet November day, a small haze of green spreads over the field as germination commences.

The point of this short note is to update you on the vegetation which has appeared, despite the ruthless spraying programme. Before the first spray, members of the society recorded some forty species with, thankfully, nothing of rarity value. Both *Kickxia* (Fluellen) species had been seen previously but were not there at that time. The following summer saw a huge population of groundsel and in spring 2002 there were vast quantities of *Alopecurus geniculatus* (Marsh Foxtail). There was an unavoidable delay between harrowing and sowing and this, coupled with excellent sunny weather, produced an amazing growth of *Sinapis arvensis* (Charlock). In amongst it were thousands of plants of *Kickxia* (both species) together with *Viola arvensis* (Field Pansy), *Chaenorhinum minus* (Small Toadflax) and, most pleasingly, a hundred or so plants of *Spergula arvensis* (Corn Spurry).

I cannot help feel that nature has triumphed over man and his chemical armoury – what will be more interesting is to see which of the many species win the battle to survive. Do let me know if you would like to witness the struggle!

Pat Woodruffe.

## 2003 Summer Programme

Your copy of the programme is enclosed with this newsletter and I should like to provide a few further details about some of our activities.

The Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) is planning to repeat a monitoring exercise which was first attempted in 1987-88. At this time a limited number of 10km squares was selected by BSBI and in each three tetrads (2 x 2 km squares) were specified for a full botanical survey. In the two vice counties of Wiltshire, VC7 and 8, this probably means recording in about 12 – 14 tetrads. I hesitate to be precise because some may straddle county boundaries. The purpose of the meeting on April 5<sup>th</sup> is to register the Botanical Society's interest in helping with this project. The day will be led by our two BSBI VC Recorders, Ann Hutchison and Dave Green, who will have instructions from BSBI on the precise methods of recording to be employed. The records from the previous survey are also being made available. We have chosen Bentley Wood as a venue for several reasons; firstly it lies within one of the designated tetrads and secondly – perhaps more importantly in early April – we can meet in a warm, dry barn and brew up a hot cuppa!

The BSBI is also planning to update its records of all its rare plants. Here the emphasis will be working with just one species at VC level.

Ann and Dave will tell us more of these projects at the AGM on March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Sedges are something you either love or hate. Perhaps, if we work well as a society, some members even learn to love them! Those who wish to accept the challenge might find that there are several good opportunities to meet with a range of species during our summer programme. My idea is that members may wish to press specimens, take photos or even make drawings of those they find during the season and, during our September meeting, we will have a workshop to help with identification and points to look for. Labelling pressed specimens with key features can be an ideal way of sorting them out!

I hope that you will find something in the programme for the coming summer to interest you. Please let me know how you would like it to evolve.

*Pat Woodruffe*

## Fifty Great Trees For Fifty Great Years

Fifty Great British Trees have been singled out by conservation charity the Tree Council as a tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II — as a special way to mark the Golden Jubilee. From the oldest and the rarest to some of the most historically or culturally famous they highlight the fundamental importance of trees to the national heritage and form a link between past and present.

The Big Belly Oak, Savernake Forest, has been chosen as one of the fifty. Here is its entry on the Tree Council's list:

*According to legend, the devil appears to anyone who dances naked at midnight twelve times anticlockwise around the Big Belly or Decanter Oak in Savernake Forest. This aptly named tree, which bulges into the A346, has a girth of nearly 11 metres and could be as much as a thousand years old.*

*Joan Davies*



*The Big Belly Oak, Photo: Joan Davies*

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## Membership

We welcome new members, beginners and experts alike. If you would like to join, please complete the slip and send it to:

Gwyneth Yerrington  
28 Meadowfield  
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## From the Editor

Thank you for all your notes, articles and reports of meetings. Photos are especially welcome even if not up to Joan Davies's standards. Drawings and diagrams are highly effective, as can be seen from Rita Grose's report.

Is it time to go into colour?

Deadline for the next issue: 12 April 2003. I hope to include news of the BSBI Monitoring Programme.

Please send material to:

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Swindon  
Wilts SN1 4HT

or  
richard@aisbittr.freemove.co.uk

*Richard Aisbitt*

## Future meetings

Please suggest ideas for meetings or talks. Contact me by writing to:

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*Pat Woodruffe*