

NEWSLETTER

Issue 22 Summer 2003

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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First issue with
colour
supplement!
-
Competition!

Tuesday 15 April 2003

Clattinger Farm and Upper Waterhay Meadow

Leader: Paul Darby

Clattinger Farm has been visited by the Society quite a few times since the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust acquired it in the mid 1990s and it again lived up to its reputation as one of the finest reserves in the county.

The reserve lies on neutral clay over gravel in the floodplain of the Swillbrook, part of the Upper Thames. Paul explained that the site has varying soils and geology which, together with differences in past management, have produced 12 quite different fields, each with its own collection of plants.

As we explored the reserve all sorts of species were noted including Adder's Tongue, Pepper Saxifrage, Saw-wort, Meadow Saffron and the sedges *Carex hostiana*, *C. flacca* and *C. caryophyllea*. In the riverside fields the plants of the moment were the Snake's Head Fritillaries. Quite sensational. It was a pleasant surprise to be shown a Brown Hairstreak egg on a Blackthorn twig. I've often looked for them but never managed to find any. We also saw a 22-spot Ladybird.

After a picnic lunch we moved on to another Trust reserve nearby, Upper Waterhay Meadow. This reserve consists of just the one field which is not as species-rich as Clattinger and is known mainly for its Fritillaries, a large proportion of them being white, unlike the mainly purple ones at Clattinger. Other plants seen here were *Carex disticha* and *Equisetum palustre*.

Our thanks are expressed to Paul for a lovely day.

Jean Wall

Saturday 3 May 2003

Wilton Brail

Leader: Jack Oliver

Wilton Brail is a wood immediately to the west of Bedwyn Brail, both being owned by Richard Charles. The Society paid two visits to Bedwyn Brail in 2002, at Richard's request, the first in May and the second in August.

Only six members turned up for the Wilton Brail visit, which had been specially requested by Richard who came armed with maps and lists of the Bedwyn Brail plants, and spent the whole day guiding us through the wood. In the event, 3rd May proved to be a bit early - compared with 22nd May last year at Bedwyn brail - and in consequence the plant list was not as large. The total for the day came to 156 species, whereas the May visit last year produced 213 species.

But totals do not tell the whole story, and some noteworthy species were recorded. The best find of the day, thanks to Eileen Rollo, was *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (Adder's-tongue) growing right in the middle of the path. Judging by the distribution map for this plant in *The Wiltshire Flora* this is likely to be a new record for the tetrad, and perhaps even for the hectad. *Blechnum spicant* (Hard Fern) was growing in two places by a lake, and a fine group of *Dryopteris affinis* (Scaly Male Fern) was particularly eye-catching. *Colchicum autumnale* (Meadow Saffron) is evidently rather a speciality of Wilton Brail as it was seen in at least six different places. Among the many interesting trees that Jack identified, *Larix kaempferi* (Japanese Larch) is not mentioned in *The Wiltshire Flora*.

So engrossed were we with all this recording that lunch was not taken until 3.15. As last year, Richard had prepared a sumptuous picnic, and this was very welcome after the extended morning session. Richard was anxious that we should go back to Wilton Brail later in the year to record the many species that were clearly missed during this visit. A date in July was suggested, provided a second visit can be slotted into the Society's rather full programme.

Jeremy Wood

Wednesday 14 May 2003

Chase Woods, Cranborne Chase

**Leaders: Jeremy Wood and Ian Burt
(Rushmore Estate Manager)**

Jeremy and Ian led a group of ten on a recording session and forays within the Great Rushmore Estate (6,800 acres), which straddles Wiltshire and Dorset.

We started by seeing patches of Crosswort (*Cruciata laevipes*) and Greater Butterfly Orchids. More surprising was the Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*), a root parasite from a family of obligate root parasites. It was seen and photographed at 5 foot up the *trunk* of a large Field Maple.

There were four Hampshire attenders in the group of ten, which was split into three subgroups for the

recording sessions within Hazel coppice compartments. We averaged about 80 species each in the 2¼ hours, with two groups noting Blue Columbine colonies.

We were then taken to see the broad view of the Rotherley Valley from the high vantage point at the head of the valley, over Dorset and towards the Isle of Wight. The recombined group examined the old Oregon Maple, Beech and Sycamore avenues planted by General Pitt-Rivers between 1880 and 1890. Two of the Oregon Maples were producing healthy seedlings, but sheep were eating these.

After an uneven split, the main concentration of attenders saw the orchid enclosure: 2,000 Greater Butterfly Orchids in 2 acres in the millennial year 2,000. There was a colony also of 40 Fly Orchids. The main group then saw the large population of Green Hellebores, possibly the greatest numbers in Wiltshire.

On my own, and later with Ian Burt, I feel I had an even better time examining tree girth records on the estate. The biggest Oregon Maple (first or second for Wiltshire) was near the gatehouse. The largest Caucasian Zelkova, with distant hedgerow suckering, was also the second for wilts. A great Italian Alder is the largest in Wiltshire, (unless the *national* champion in Tottenham Park can be re-found – probably gone). The great Whitebeam at ST960178 may be more than a county champion. This ancient tree is festooned with Mistletoe. According to TROBI (Tree Register of the British Isles) records, it has the second or first greatest girth of any Whitebeam in the British Isles (290 cm at 4 foot 3 inches from the ground. It deserves a name: "The Rushmore Mistletoe Whitebeam".

Our thanks to Ian and Jeremy for a diverse and rewarding day.

Jack Oliver



Rosemary and the swan - peaceful for the moment

Thursday, May 22nd

Coate Park Country Park, Swindon.

Leader: Bob Sharman

It was a murky morning with a chilly wind and rain threatened. Thus there were only four of us but the rain stayed in the clouds and we had a lovely time.

The main part of Coate Water, now well used for boating and so on, was dammed 170 years ago as a reservoir for the canal. Bob Sharman, the ranger, took us to a distant and deserted part that was only fully dammed and flooded in the 1970s. At once Jack identified *Quercus x rosacea*, which was a minor excitement. We walked through two good meadows, thick with Yellow Rattle, then got down to work on, and off, a board walk of c.75 yards over bogginess.

The main shrub was *Cornus sericea* (American Dogwood) with a sprinkling of willows; *Salix cinerea* (Grey Willow) *S. fragilis* (Crack Willow) *S. triandra* (Almond Willow) and *S. viminalis* (Osier) Below, there were five sorts of sedge; *Carex acutiformis*, *C. hirta*, *C. nigra*, *C. otrubae* and *C. riparia*, also four rushes; *Juncus acutiflorus*, *J. conglomeratus*, *J. effusus* and *J. inflexus*. *Glyceria* was well represented with *G. fluitans*, *G. maxima* and *G. notata*. There was also a selection of the usual suspects in such conditions: *Veronica beccabunga* (Brooklime) *Mentha aquatica* (Water Mint) *Lycopus europaeus* (Gypsywort) *Persicaria amphibia* (Amphibious Bistort) and so on. We found about 70 spp, in this short stretch of uniform habitat.

On arrival at a hide at the water's edge we squelched along the shore looking for anything new - not much. A swan came to investigate and was torn between begging for crumbs and warning us off his territory. He followed us back along the shore and then had a go at Richard, giving his knee a mighty thwack with its wing.

On returning to base Jack went off to measure some trees while the rest of us ate our picnic and then had a brisk walk right round the main lake with minimal botanising.

Rosemary Duckett



WBS Visit to Langford Lakes 1 Jun 03

Sunday 1st June 2003 (Morning)

Langford Lakes

Leader: Chris Riley (Wiltshire Wildlife Trust)

Eleven members paid a first visit to Langford Lakes, the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's most recently acquired Reserve, and were received by the resident Warden,

Chris Riley. He explained that this was primarily an ornithological reserve, consisting of two large lakes, (formerly gravel pits) and a stretch of the River Wylye. Some reconstruction work had been done to make it more 'bird friendly' and in the disturbed areas wild flower seeds had been sown to increase the botanical diversity of the Reserve.

Despite an unexpected shower of light rain we circumnavigated the Reserve and saw a wide variety of flowers grasses and sedges but no rarities - the Green Flowered Helleborine (*Epipactis phyllanthes*) recorded here in the past was not showing itself at present. Interesting finds for me were the Blue and Pink and/or hybrid version of Water Speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica/catenata*), Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*), Large Bitter-cress (*Cardamine amara*) and ?Slender Tare (*Vicia parviflora*). The experts spent some time on Water-crowfoot identification!

Tony Dale



WBS Visit to Langford Lakes 1 Jun 03

photos: Tony Dale

Sunday June 1st 2003

Coombe Bissett Down

Leader: Piers Mobsby (Wiltshire Wildlife Trust)

At 2 p.m. it seemed that only one person from the Society was going to turn up but then 4 more arrived only a few minutes late having taken a wrong turning on the way from Langford Lakes.

The leader, Piers Mobsby, from the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust showed us a Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*) in flower just inside the first gate to the Reserve. There was a larger one outside the gate overtopping surrounding brambles and nettles.

He then gave us a talk about the reserve. In addition to the steep chalk downland there is a valley being restored to chalk grassland by sheep grazing. He said that it was becoming difficult to find farmers needing to lend their flock when there is so much better quality grazing available.

There is a third area consisting of arable fields on higher ground which has more recently been acquired. It will be necessary to deplete the soil of fertilisers. This will be achieved by planting Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*) for several years and removing the crop. Once the soil has been impoverished surrounding native plants would colonise the fields but the process will be hastened by gathering seed by brush-harvesting from the downland and sowing it.

Most of the afternoon was spent on the downland admiring the diversity. Burnt Orchid (*Orchis ustulata*) was in full flower and Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) was opening. The leaves of Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*) were seen but fruiting had long passed.

Piers is responsible for recording and monitoring for the Trust. He showed us how to recognise Meadow Oat-grass (*Helictotrichon pratense*) and Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) from a single leaf and to pick them out among Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*) and other grasses even without flowers.

The good weather helped us to enjoy a very pleasurable and instructive afternoon.

Roger Veall

Wiltshire Botanical Society field trip to South Wales, 8 to 11 June 2003

**The Hill College,
Abergavenny**

Monday 9 June 2003

Kenfig National Nature Reserve

Leader: Dave Carrington

Our first visit of the trip was to Kenfig National Nature Reserve, which is one of the most important of the country. It is a large sand dune system on the south coast of Wales close to Porthcawl. The sand engulfed a mediaeval town in the 15thC: nothing now remains except the remnants of a castle, which we did not visit. We were met by Dave Carrington, the Reserve Manager, who spent a large part of the day with us. He told us that groundwater on the reserve comes from the limestone country behind the coast. Blowholes created by the wind become damp in the bottom and the sand is thus fixed, creating dune slacks. This is an important feature of Kenfig.

One of the specialities of the reserve is the rare Shrill Carder Bee, *Bombus sylvarum*, which needs a continuous supply of nectar from May through to August. It has a long tongue, with which it feeds on Yellow Rattle, Birds-foot Trefoil and Red Clover, all of which were growing in abundance in the Car Park, and later in the year, Red Bartsia.

We headed towards Kenfig Pool, the largest natural freshwater lake in South Wales, passing an old well which is frequented by Great Crested Newts in spring. The lake is very clean, as no stream runs into it. It is a site for rare Medicinal Leeches and for large quantities of Stonewort. Lesser Water Plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides* was growing in a shallow pool and Brookweed *Samolus valerandi* and Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* in damp spots.

Then we came to a feast of orchids in a large dune slack: Southern Marsh *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, Early Marsh *D. incarnata* in both lush creamy apricot and brilliant madder red forms, Pyramidal *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and finally the rare speciality of the reserve, the little Fen Orchid *Liparis loeselii*, less brightly coloured and more difficult to see until we got our eye in. In among the orchids were the tiny pink flowers of Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*.

We picnicked in a "blowhole" surrounded by familiar

limestone plants such as Common Milkwort, Pyramidal Orchids, Birds-foot Trefoil and a few Bee Orchids and were entertained by the antics of Meadow Pippets. On the far side was a small group of Round-Leaved Wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia*.

In the early afternoon we moved towards the beach, where the lovely Sea Bindweed *Calystegia soldanella* was growing in a number of places. Unfortunately our guide had to leave us then and we split up into numerous small groups to make our way back to the Reserve Centre, rejoicing in the proliferation of Burnet Rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*, including the rare pink form. A very rewarding day, blessed by fine weather.

Gillian King

Tuesday 10 JUNE 2003

Wye Valley Hay Meadow and Woodlands

Leader: Dave Green

Our second day of this fabulous trip began with plant heaven. Led by the inspirational 'botanic man' Dave Green we started at a new Gwent Wildlife Trust reserve called New Grove Meadows exploring the northern meadows which have been traditionally managed with no chemical improvements and just the one hay cut per year in late July.

Sheer joy – through a five-barred gate into a haze of yellow, pink and green. The site is neutral to acid grassland with very little grass! Thousands of 'Dacs', common spotted, and southern marsh hybrids, not one specimen of a pure southern marsh orchid among them but all beautiful, bold, big and bursting. Vestiges of an earlier massive flush of green winged orchids still lingered with one still photographable white one. Numerous tall Twayblades and a golden foil of yellow rattle and rough Hawkbit sparkling the pinks of orchids and knapweeds. Muted whites of hogweed and pignut. Twinkling oxeye daisies, tidy blue heath milkwort, Bishops' hats of Selfheal. Marvellous masses of colour! On down and into the adjacent field passing nipping nettles and saucy sorrel, much more grass here, common bent, sweet vernal, fescues red and sheep's, Yorkshire fog. Bouffant hairdos of elder sprouting above the mixed hedgerow and a lovely collection of the gently lobed and gently white heath spotted orchid. The beginnings of a fairy ring and a seriously violet click beetle added to the magic!

Then south to Cleddon Shoots, just a short walk from the car park at Ninewells Wood past dry stone walls hosting Common Polypody, Black and Maidenhair Spleenworts and Dog Lichen in fruit into a well-stocked acid bog, the site of an old pond. Ragged Robin and the lovely Heath Spotted Orchids, surrounded by lush

sedges, Oval, Wood, Hairy, Star, but most notably the voluptuous DD fruits of the Carnation Sedge! (cup size estimated by Dave!). Other lovelies were Bog Asphodel, Lousewort, Marsh Speedwell, Lesser Spearwort, Yellow Pimpernel, Marsh Bedstraw and so much more not to forget the delightful juvenile toad, and a passing pretty Painted Lady.

We left the bog and moved into the steeply sloping wood a damp, winding shady place, home to Soft Shield, Broad Buckler and Hard Ferns, Wood Stitchwort, Wood Millet, Hairy Woodrush, Opposite and Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrages, the unusual white Herb Robert, and not so common Houndstongue. The summer rain drizzled softly through the tree canopy.

We travelled on south again to see the very rare Tintern Spurge just a short walk into Ravensnest Wood south west of Tintern Parva. A healthy patch was flowering there that probably goes unnoticed. I have already forgotten its notable features!

Finally southeast to Black Cliff, a very shaded limestone woodland. Up the narrow footpath looking for birds nest orchids, those slightly sinister, almost invisibly camouflaged, pale inhabitants of deep shade. Dave had already spied them out and he led us to them, it would have been easy to miss them. Narrow Leaved Bittercress was on the path. Just a little further on a shaft of sunlight lured us to the finale of the day, a secret, small sparkling dell, all fallen branches and soft lush mosses and a Small Leaved Lime glowing in the light.

Lesley Wallington

Wednesday 11 June 2003

Magor Marsh Nature Reserve

Leader: Louisa Kilgallen

The Romans first built sea walls along the now Gwent coast with drainage of the land impounded. This has continued to now when there is a hierarchy of channels; pills, being small creeks running north to south, laterals maintained by the internal drainage board, farm ditches maintained by the farmers and, immediately inland of the sea wall, a back ditch to cope with any tidal inundation or seepage below the wall and discharging through tidal flaps to the estuary. The soil was peat, overlying limestone. With oxidation of the drained peat the land level has fallen and can be lower than that of the shore beyond the sea wall. At Magor Marsh Reserve the Gwent Wildlife Trust manage their system of ditches to keep the site wet throughout the year. The pond relies on alkaline, artesian water from the limestone feeding into it from below. But there can be times of low water pressure in the limestone when

the water drains back out of the pond into the aquifer.

Leaving our sandwiches at the tightly packed car park we sallied forth with the usual enthusiasm but in single file with long poled shrimp net wielded with consummate skill by Louisa Kilgallen, our leader for the day, assisted by Dave Green armed with a dangerous looking grapple. Walking the welcome system of board walks through the *Phragmites australis* (Common Reed) these tools caught five kinds of duckweed: *Lemna minuta* (Least), *L. minor* (Common), *L. trisulca* (Ivy Leaved), *L. gibba* (Fat) and *Spirodela polyrhiza* (Greater) with minute leeches also *Zannichellia palustris* (Horned Pondweed) and three-spined sticklebacks. A pair of swans with eight cygnets made their way along a ditch. The board walk ostensibly leading to a hide which proved to be only its ashes after a fire.

Other plants seen.

Berula erecta (Lesser Water-parsnip)
Bromus commutatus (Meadow Brome)
Carex riparia (Greater Pond-sedge)
Carex hirta (Hairy Sedge)
Elodea canadensis (?) (Canadian Waterweed)
Equisetum fluviatile (Water Horsetail)
Filipendula ulmaria (Meadowsweet)
Galium palustre (Marsh Bedstraw)
Glyceria sp. (a Sweet Grass)
Myosotis arvensis (Field Forget-me-not)
Oenanthe fistulosa (Tubular Water-dropwort)
Ranunculus flammula (Lesser Spearwort)
Ranunculus sceleratus (Celery-leaved Buttercup)
Scutellaria galericulata (Skullcap)
Senecio squalidus (Oxford Ragwort)
Senecio aquaticus (Marsh Ragwort)
Sparganium erectum (Branched Bur-reed)
Stellaria uliginosa (Bog Stitchwort)
Stellaria palustris (Marsh Stitchwort)
Veronica beccabunga (Brooklime)

Second Severn Bridge at The Pill

The embankment for the M4 leaving Gwent for the Second Severn Crossing constitutes the latest sea wall so a new back ditch has been constructed inland and colonised by brackish water tolerant species though subject to intermittent flushing by water from a paper mill. On the banks of ditch or motorway embankment we found:

Armoracia rusticana (Horse Radish)
Bolboschoenus maritimus (Sea Club-rush)
Linaria repens (Pale Toadflax)
Lycopus europaeus (Gypsywort or Gipsywort)
Poa compressa (Flattened Meadow-grass)
Sisymbrium officinale (Hedge Mustard)
Toriiis nodosa (Knotted Hedge-parsley)
Valerianella locusta (Common Cornsalad)

Going under the M4 we came out at a saltmarsh that had regenerated since the motorway works and which was mainly dominated by five species:

Aster tripolium (Sea Aster)
Puccinellia maritimum (Common Saltmarsh-grass)
Salicornia spp. (Glassworts)
Spartina anglica (Common Cord-grass)
Suaeda maritima (Annual sea-blite)

Other plants in the saltmarsh

Armeria maritima (Thrift)
Atriplex sp (An Orache) not keyed out
Beta maritima (Sea Beet)
Elytrigia atherica (Sea Couch)
Parapholis strigosa (Hard-grass)
Plantago maritima (Sea Plantain)
Plantago coronopus (Buck's horn Plantain)
Spergularia maritima (Lesser Sea-spurrey)
Spergularia media (Greater Sea-spurrey)

From that point we departed our various ways most appreciative of the effort that had been put into such a successful three day visit, enhanced by the friendly hospitality, comfortable accommodation and excellent food at The Hill Adult Education Centre in Abergavenny.

Our thanks go to Louisa for a fascinating day and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this note.

Mollie and Christopher Perraton

Ann Hutchison, BSBI Recorder

Ann is giving up her task as Plant Recorder for the south of Wiltshire, Vice County 8, after being in office for over a quarter of a century. The Wiltshire Botanical Society would like to thank her warmly for the huge amount of help and advice that she has given over this period. John Ounsted adds the following:

Ann Hutchison joined BSBI in 1959. Working as a librarian in a scientific institution and living in Salisbury she was well qualified to become our official Recorder for South Wilts in 1976. I retired (from Essex) to Fordingbridge 6 years later to rejoin the team working on the Flora of Hants (1996) and, as much of this corner of Hants is actually in v-c 8, had the pleasure of working with Ann from 1982 on. I also helped with Wiltshire Flora (1993) so have been able to admire the courage with which she tackles field recording in spite of arthritis; and desk-work at her homes in Wilton, and then Mere, in spite of computers! We wish her luck with her forth-coming surgery.

Photo

Graphics

Wednesday June 18th 2003

Morgan's Hill and Cherhill Down

**Leaders: Christopher and Mollie
Perraton, Joy Newton**

We met at Smallgrain picnic site by the North Wiltshire Golf Course. Christopher and Mollie took us up to the nature reserve, where the old Roman road along the southern edge was temporarily closed to allow repairs. Near the entrance we found Woolly Thistle, Common Spotted Orchid, Fragrant Orchid, Lesser Butterfly Orchid, with its parallel pollinia distinguishing it from the diverging pollinia of the Greater Butterfly Orchid, and Rough Hawkbit

In the lime workings, we found Spiny Restharrow, Marsh Helleborine, Twayblade, around 8 Fly Orchids, Valerian, Rosy Garlic

On our return to base, we also found Rock Rose, Salad Burnett, Dropwort, Frog Orchid, and Rough Chervil

We drove to Cherhill Down after lunch and Joy led us up a track off the A4. Two species of Rose of special interest grow here; Sweet Briar (*Rosa rubiginosa*) and the hybrid *R. canina* x *R. rubiginosa* = *R. nitidula*.

On the banks of the steep hillside grew Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) Chalk Milkwort (*Polygala calcarea*) and Spiny Restharrow (*Ononis spinosa*) There was also plenty of Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and Lesser Butterfly –orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*)

On the downland we found many large patches of Bastard Toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*)

We then descended to a small fenced area where many small Junipers grew, and more orchids. The wind meant the butterflies were scarce; we only found one Adonis Blue and that was dead.

The highlight of the afternoon was a group of eighteen Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*) one of which was an unusual variety (*Ophrys apifera* var. *chlorantha*). The sepals were cream and the lip a pale greenish-yellow. A good finale to the day.

Edwin Carter

Wednesday July 2nd 2003

Earldoms

Leader: Pat Woodruffe

Six of us, led by Pat Woodruffe, then spent the afternoon at Earldoms, near Whiteparish, where the focus was on ferns. But first we took the opportunity to look at two scarce tree species close to where we parked the cars, this being a disused stretch of the A36 before the road was realigned some years ago. Small-leaved Limes (*Tilia cordata*) grow all along the boundary banks on both sides of the old road, and a much-pollarded Wild Service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) was fortunately preserved when a radio mast was erected recently within yards of it.

We then crossed the busy A36 and followed a footpath through a wooded area near Earldoms Lodge, just to the south of the road. This wood is particularly rich in ferns, and one of the objects was to test out a key to the ferns of Wiltshire that Pat had put together. Altogether 11 species of fern (including bracken) were found, and Pat showed us how to use the key in order to spot the small differences which distinguish some of the closely related species. One of the most impressive examples was the difference between Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) and Hard Shield-fern (*P. aculeatum*), which demands detailed inspection of the pinnules with a hand lens. But even a lens is not sufficient when it comes to *Polypodium*, and it really requires microscopic examination of the sori to distinguish between Common Polypody (*P. vulgare*) and Western Polypody (*P. interjectum*). After much debate it was considered more likely that we were looking at the latter. Altogether a very absorbing afternoon, and as a result of this exercise Pat has been able to make some refinements to the key.

Jeremy Wood

Sunday July 13th 2003

Chippenham Wastelands

Monica Blake and Marjorie Waters

On a blazing summer's morning ten members met in a car park in the heart of Chippenham. From this apparently unpromising start we set out on a most rewarding botanical tour.

A footpath led us to the east side of the Avon River where we admired some of our commoner waterside plants, Purple Loosestrife, Greater Willowherb, Water Figwort, Amphibious Bistort and Reed Sweet Grass being particularly noticeable. We also examined plantings of American Dogwood and Italian Alder, and were intrigued to be shown holes made by water voles, one of which Monica had seen quite recently. An unexpected sighting was of a Common Tern which flew up and down and the obligingly posed for us to examine on a post sticking out of the water.

Crossing the Town Bridge a colourful display of purple Lucerne and Perforate St John's Wort adorned the western banks alongside Upright Hedge Parsley and Tansy. Almost lost amongst them keen eyes spotted Ploughman's Spikenard (*Inula conyzae*), very dwarf on this occasion. We went on past Marsh Woundwort and Water Speedwell in or near the water to find Ivy-leaved Toadflax and Pellitory of the Wall – where else but in the wall.

We then visited a 'weedy' area on a traffic island adjoining another car park. Weld, Ragwort, Spear and Creeping Thistle abounded amongst others, the two thistles attracting several types of bumblebee. Passing through the car park a stand of Prickly Lettuce had us confused for a time, as the leaves were much more lobed than usual.

A visit to the yard of the Black Horse Inn proved that such places could provide more than liquid refreshment. Canadian Fleabane and Shaggy Soldier (*Galinsoga ciliata*) grew in profusion.

Enjoying the shade of several large and beautiful mature trees, we noted Rat's-tail Fescue (*Vulpia myuros*), Russian Comfrey and Meadow Cranesbill. Swans and coots were plentiful on the river as were damselflies and a Brown Hawker Dragonfly.

Then, down a narrow alley, below barred cellar openings in the pavement, a wonderful display of ferns – Hart's Tongue (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*), Maidenhair Spleenwort, (*Asplenium trichomanes*) and the rare Brittle Bladder Fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*).

Wastelands? Treasure houses for botanists more likely!

Gwyneth Yerrington

Sunday 13 July 2003

Kennet and Avon Canal at Semington

Monica Blake and Marjorie Waters

A determined group of enthusiasts braved the afternoon heat to explore the canal side plants. Jack bought along his amazing hooked pole for hoiking out aquatic plants only to be disappointed as the canal has been treated with aquatic weedkiller for the benefit of the canal boats.

There was however plenty to entertain, floating and terrestrial Amphibious Bistort (*Persicaria amphibia*), the delightful Skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*) with its pretty dark blue flowers and perky very visible dark 'skullcaps', the very fine Branched Bur-Reed (*Sparganium erectum*), lovely tactile stem with three corners at the base, perfect keeled leaves and bonny flowers, the females a burst of beautiful yellow below the more compact darker males. The Gipsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*), disappointing with such a romantic name as it is neither colourful nor scented but discretely white flowered and straight laced with stiff square stems! There was also the lush Reed Sweet-grass beloved of cattle and the aptly named Greater Tussock Sedge (*Carex paniculata*) an inviting green cushion to sit on if it wasn't so near the waters edge.

Other plants were Lesser Pond Sedge (*Carex acutiformis*), Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Water Dock, Water Mint, False Fox Sedge (*Carex otrubae*), Floating Bent Grass (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Dove's-foot Cranesbill (*Geranium molle*), and Water figwort. We also saw mating pair of Banded Demoiselle, a Black Tailed Skimmer and a very friendly adolescent swan

Lesley Wallington

Friday 18 July 2003

Jones's Mill

Leader Beverley Heath

About a dozen members met on a day which was overcast and, thankfully, cooler than some experienced earlier in the week. We were met by Beverley Heath, the reserve's warden, who escorted us and pointed out many plants of interest.

This Wiltshire Wildlife Trust reserve has developed into fenland following the abandonment of a water meadow system. Today the area seems more typical of the Norfolk Broads than of north Wiltshire but it has formed because the high water table has allowed sedge peat to accumulate over Greensand. We started by walking in carr, through areas dominated by *Glyceria maxima*, *Carex paniculata* and *Equisetum telemateiatelmateia* and it was here that we spotted several plants of particular interest. The first was the nettle that does not sting *Urtica galeopsifolia* (found also at Smallbrook Meadows), the second was a single plant of stone parsley *Sison amomum* and finally plants of the narrow-leaved hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* var. *angustifolium*. It was in this area that Beverley had found, quite recently, the remains of a crayfish which most probably had been taken by a mink or even by an otter.

We moved away from the carr into an open area where we were shown marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*. This plant is quite rare in Wiltshire but is more common in the northern part of UK. Growing in the vicinity was yet another gem – a single, small plant of the Green-flowered Helleborine *Epipactis phyllanthes*. Several areas were dominated by sedges and we were able to see the unusual bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*, flea sedge *C. pulicaris* and also brown sedge *C. disticha*. Walking through different sections of the reserve, we could compare the vegetation and the effects of grazing by Belted Galloway cattle. The many plants over which we enthused are far too numerous to list here but a final one deserves to be mentioned – the hybrid between the blue and pink forms of water-speedwell *Veronica anagallis-aquatica* x *V. catenata*. This plant is given the unpronounceable name *V. x lackschewitzii* and does not appear to be fertile.

Beverley Heath greeted us with the comment 'of course I am not a botanist' and quickly went on to prove that he new a great deal about the vegetation on his reserve. We thank him not only for the time spent with us but, more importantly, for the effort which ensures that this lovely reserve thrives for all to enjoy.

Pat Woodruffe

Tuesday 5 August 2003

Marlborough College

Leaders: Jack Oliver and Maureen Ponting

A large group of members gathered at Marlborough College for a tour of some of the College grounds south of the A4 and of the Master's garden. The participation of Sean Dempster, Head of Biology, and Robert Tindall, the Head Gardener made the visit more special.

A nature trail in the grounds covers many different habitats including the trout ponds, the river Kennet, the water meadows, semi-ancient oak woodland and chalk downland, although we didn't have time to visit all these habitats. The ponds are used by the Summer School and the College Fly Fishing Society.

The trail booklet contains descriptions and interesting facts, written by Jack Oliver, of 35 numbered trees. Among the tree species we saw were Italian Alder, Hybrid Black Poplar, Spindle and the deciduous conifers Dawn Redwood, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, and Swamp Cypress, *Taxodium distichum*, one growing in the water. The latter two trees can be confused, however the foliage of the Redwood appears earlier in the year and the leaves and shoots are generally opposite one another whereas the Swamp Cypress has leaves arranged alternately.

We looked at one of the trout ponds which was being cleaned so didn't look its best with lots of filamentous algae draped around its sides.

Continuing along the trail we noted *Polypodium interjectum* with its oval, bright yellow sporangia and fronds over 40cm long, mainly epiphytic on White Willow, and also Dewberry, Hairy Brome, Slender Speedwell, and the red alga *Hildenbrandia*, on a stone in the river Kennet.

On the downland we saw Salad Burnet, Devil's-bit Scabious and Clustered Bellflower and looked for Autumn Gentian which Maureen remembered seeing in a previous year but we didn't find it. It may have been too early in the season. The downland is now being managed under a Countryside Stewardship Scheme which prohibits the use of inorganic fertilisers and pesticides.

After lunch we moved on to see the Master's garden which was a complete contrast to the nature trail. The head gardener provided us with many interesting facts and stories and Maureen provided us with the names of all the garden species. There is a lovely, large Copper Beech under which Tennyson wrote some of his poetry. The garden contains a wonderful collection of herbaceous perennials that any gardener would be proud of. Included in these are *Euphorbia griffithii*,

Phlox, *Eryngium* "Miss Wilmot's Ghost" and the attractive white plumes of *Artemisia lactiflora*. I was impressed by the *Fremontodendron*, with its golden-yellow flowers, trained up the wall of the house and a colourful mixture of grass species had been planted in a new bed.

I'm sure it must have been one of the hottest days of the summer and a much needed, refreshing cold drink was provided by Robert. After our drink we were shown the Cockspur Thorn, *Crataegus crus-galli*, and Jack showed us the two trees that he had chosen to be planted for him as a thank you by the College for helping with the nature trail. These are the very beautiful *Tilia oliveri* and *Tilia henryana*.

Those who could not make this trip missed a very enjoyable event conducted by four excellent guides.

Jean Wall

Tuesday 2 September 2003

Bentley Wood

Leader: Pat Woodruffe

Ten of us met at Bentley to try and get to grips with the idea of the classifying different woodland communities, whether natural or planted, according to key components of their vegetation. Use of the NVC system is becoming more widespread and articles frequently refer to a habitat by this means. Without some knowledge of the terminology, the point being made is lost on the reader.

English Nature funded the mapping of Bentley according to NVC descriptors. The wood was surveyed by Phil Wilson and Marion Reed and we were able to use their results to help us. Not surprisingly, soils and geology are important factors in the determination of vegetation and The Forestry Commission, when replanting most of Bentley, made good use of this information. Beech were planted to the north, on chalky soils, and Oak to the south on clay soils. It became relatively easy to break these areas down further and identify areas where the soils were shallow – Beech, Ash, Dog's Mercury (W12a) – and compare with areas with deeper soils – Beech, Oak, Bramble (W14). In the southerly areas plantations of Oak have given rise to a limited ground flora in which Yorkshire Fog is often frequent - English Oak, bracken and bramble, Yorkshire Fog sub-community (W10d) whilst some of the older areas of Oak support a better flora and are classified as W10a.

We were able to build on these few basic types and develop some appreciation of the system and, more importantly, look at its possible value as a conservation tool rather than just a user-unfriendly method of classification.

In the afternoon we visited the Draining Field and recorded the species present one year after sowing with a wild flower mix. Although the dicots were slow to germinate, and few have flowered this year, we did find that the majority of the species sown were present together with many of those whose seeds are a remnant of the many years of arable cultivation. This is a particularly valuable exercise and provides us with a basis for future recording work; thank you for your help.

During the course of the day we did look at a few plants in detail – those that had not dried up – and interesting finds included several remarkably large examples of *Anthoxanthum odoratum* as well as *Senecio erucifolius*, *Centaureum pulchellum* and *Colchicum autumnale*.

I must apologise to those who had hoped there would be sufficient time to look at sedges. That's a task to carry over to next year's field programme.

Pat Woodruffe

Autumn Ladies Tresses in the garden.

On the morning of August 25th, I was on my way to the local supermarket and happened to glance over my neighbour's front wall.

The lawn had dried out because of the continuing hot weather, but there were half a dozen prominent green stalks showing above the grass. At first I thought they were coarse grasses, although a small white area near the base of one was unusual, but might have been the underside of a leaf, as the lawn contained several weeds. It crossed my mind what they could be, but doubting the possibility I continued on my way. However on the return journey my curiosity got the better of me and I went into the garden to have a closer look. I was delighted to find out that the stalks were indeed those of the Autumn Ladies Tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*). In due course all six stems flowered, and the householders, Val and Rod Sperring, were intrigued to find that they had a wild orchid



photo: John Tucker



Autumn Ladies Tresses - photo: John Tucker

established in their garden.

It was pure luck that the dry spell made it unnecessary to cut the grass at the time when the flowering spikes developed. They must have been there for many years, as it is at least 5 years from seed to flowering spikes under laboratory conditions, and probably much longer in the wild. Indeed Val thinks that she had noticed a flower on a previous occasion, probably a partially mown one. Rod kindly mowed around the plants and they have now set seed. Because of the short grass around them it was easy to find the rosettes of leaves which will supply the nutriment for next years flowers. The spot has been marked and it is hoped that the flowers will appear again.

My thanks are due to Val and Rod Sperring, Ridings Mead, Chippenham.

John Tucker. 17.10.03.

Plant press for loan

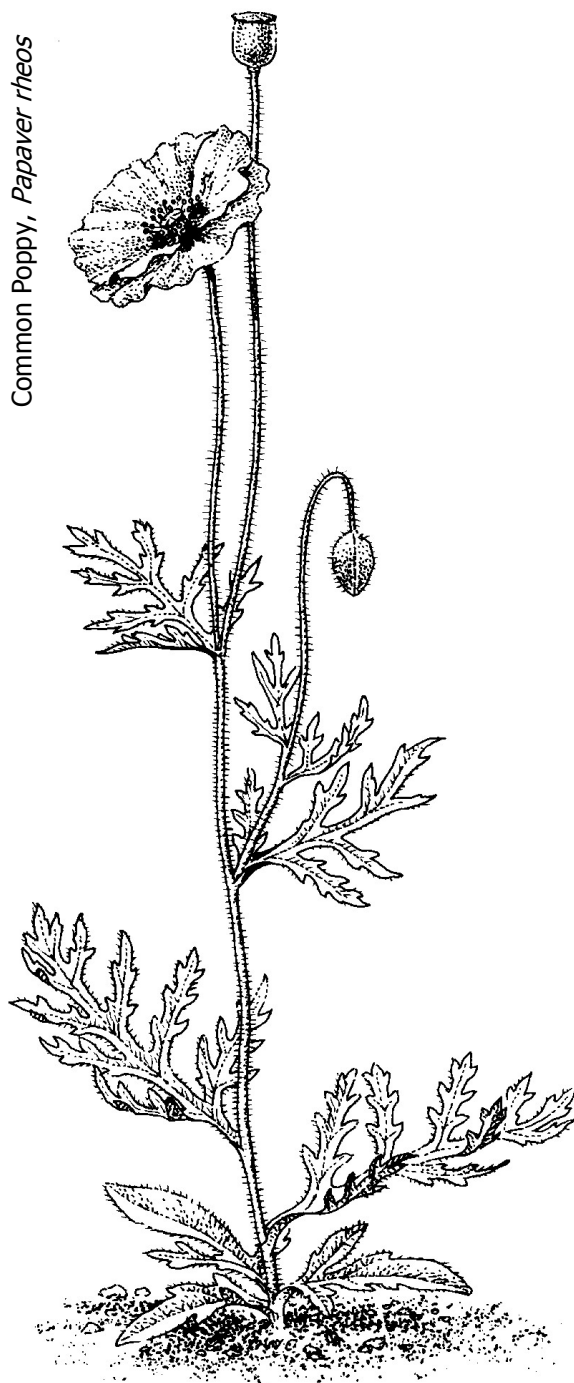
Ann Sawyer has generously given the Botanical Society her plant press. It is 30 cm x 50 cm. If anyone would like to use it, please contact Pat Woodruffe.

FWAG's¹ project to help save Wiltshire's rare arable plants



Plants such as cornflower, *Centaurea cyanus*, and corn marigold, *Chrysanthemum segetum*, which once added a splash of colour to our arable farmland, have largely disappeared from the very cereal fields that gave many of them their names. A new countywide project has

Common Poppy, *Papaver rhoeas*



been launched, aimed at promoting the conservation of these plants.

Arable farmland can support a unique collection of plants that are adapted to colonise the disturbed land created by tillage. Nearly 300 species of wild plant have been found on arable land, including species such as shepherd's needle, *Scandix pecten-veneris*, pheasant's eye, *Adonis annua*, and rough poppy, *Papaver hybridum*.

However, once widespread and common cornfield flowers have suffered a serious decline due to changes in agricultural practices over the last 60 years, including faster maturing crops, increased efficiency of modern herbicides and a move away from traditional rotations. These plants may now be the rarest species on the farm!

Fortunately, Wiltshire still supports a number of important rare arable plants. The county is nationally important for the spectacular pheasant's eye and red hemp nettle, *Galeopsis angustifolium*. There is also a characteristic community of nationally scarce species, including corn gromwell, *Lithospermum arvense*, corn parsley, *Petroselinum segetum*, and Venus's looking glass, *Legousia hybrida*.

In recognition of this, Wiltshire FWAG, supported by English Nature and Defra², has set up the Wiltshire Rare Arable Plants Project. The project aims to review existing records of arable plant distribution and work with local, botanists, farmers and agronomists to record new sites and secure management beneficial to these plants.

To help conserve these plants some farmers are leaving un-cropped cultivated margins in their fields, which will encourage them to grow. Others are actually restricting the types of herbicides they use so that the plants can grow whilst still allowing the farmer to produce a crop. These margins are known as conservation headlands. Not only does this help these rare plants, it can also provide valuable habitat for other farmland wildlife including hares, grey partridge and beneficial insects.

Where to look

The best places to look for these plants are on the headland of fields, which have a long history of cultivation (more than 100 years). Generally lighter soils on sunny south facing slopes tend to support a richer flora.

Do you know where these plants still grow?

Despite parts of Wiltshire being recognised as nationally important for these plants, their distribution and current status are still poorly known. The project is working with local botanists, agronomists and farmers to record sites where these species occur - hopefully this will confirm old records and identify new locations.

The project is working in conjunction with Plantlife's national arable plants survey and is using their recording forms. Any Wiltshire records sent to Plantlife are then sent to Simon to include in the project database. Using the data collated as part of the project, maps are being produced identifying the key sites and core areas to ensure the conservation of these fascinating plants. As part of the project a number of field trips and training events will also be held during next summer. If you would like to get involved with the Wiltshire Rare Arable Plants Project contact Simon Smart at Wiltshire FWAG³.

Simon Smart

¹ Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

² Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

³ Wiltshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Longacre House, Frome Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire. BA14 0DQ

Success for arable plants

Last summer, while rather confined to home territory I did a flora survey of a farm in south Wiltshire. In previous years, it was managed as arable, with very 'clean' fields, scarcely a weed in sight. Two years back I did find one tiny plant of Venus's-looking Glass but nothing else of interest.

In 2003, the farm was given a Countryside Stewardship Grant. One of the constraints was to leave unsprayed, uncultivated field margins. This resulted in an amazing diversity of arable weeds including all four species of poppy on just one headland. There were large numbers of Venus's-looking Glass, Round-leaved Fluellen and Treacle Mustard. All of these must have arisen from long buried seed. Details of this survey are to be published soon in Wiltshire Studies.

Barbara Last, 05/01/2004

Books for loan

The following books are for loan in addition to those mentioned in previous newsletters.

- "Fleurs et paysages des Causses" by Christian Bernard. In French. Covers an area from Lodeve in the south to Marvejols in the north and from Rodez in the West to Florac in the east.
- "Landscapes of Madeira" by John & Pat Underwood. A Sunflower Countryside Guide.
- "Madeira - Flowers" by L O Franquinho & A da Costa.
- "The Flora of the Canary Islands" by Hubert Moeller.
- "Lilies of the Field" A book of Cyprus Wild Flowers by Ann Matthews.

Contact Jean Wall to borrow these books.

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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
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Bradford on Avon
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Subscriptions:

Ordinary Member----- £5.00 per year
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Wiltshire Botanical Society

Name:

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Please make cheques payable to "Wiltshire Botanical Society"

Books wanted

Do you have a copy of either of these books that you would be willing to sell?

- Blamey and Grey Wilson 'Flowers of the Mediterranean'
- Donald Grose, 'The Wiltshire Flora'

Please contact Pat Woodruffe (details below)

From the Editor

Please remember members' active participation is important, so let the committee know your thoughts. If you enjoyed a particular lecture or outing do tell us.

Please send material to:

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or

richardaisbitt@yahoo.co.uk

Richard Aisbitt

Future meetings

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

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