

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 2

Summer Meetings

Charterhouse-on-Mendip - 30th May 1992

The very first meeting of the Wiltshire Botanical Society was held at Charterhouse-on-Mendip, over the border into Somerset, on 30th May 1992. With Dave Green leading, eight of us spent the morning on the old lead workings - a fascinating area for geology and industrial archaeology as well as botany. We found several species which favour old mine workings including *Minuartia verna*, (Spring Sandwort), *Thlaspi caerulescens* (Alpine Penny-cress) and *Arabis hirsuta* (Hairy Rock-cress), *Potentilla norvegica* (Ternate-leaved Cinquefoil) was an interesting alien rarity, and a long lake contained plenty of *Hippuris vulgaris* (Mare's-tail). We explored the mounds, hollows and streams finding several *Carex* species, and came to long firing kilns where small boys were sent in to scrape lead off the sides, much to the detriment of their health. After lunch the sun shone and we walked in the other direction to Cheddar Gorge.

Some of the highlights were *Carex montana* (Soft-leaved sedge) *Cystopteris fragilis* (Brittle Bladder-fern) *Gymnocarpium robertianum* (Limestone Fern) and *Vicia orobus* (Wood Bitter-vetch). A great beginning to the W.B.S.

J.N.

Matley Bog and Hatchett Ponds - 25th July 1992

Dave Green cheerfully led this outing on acidic wetland flora. The Bog attempted to claim one victim (JEO) who sank to hip level; he and his wallet were rescued and the group were able to enjoy, with relief, a day seeing a variety of plants not found in Wiltshire. Hatchett ponds had one area where the very rare native Hampshire Purslane co-existed with the invasive newcomer *Crassula helmsii* (N.Z. Pygmy weed).

The prevailing group of interest in both sites were the Monocotyledons, some species being abundant and well known to acid land botanists but others were rare and unfamiliar, even to the experts.

First spotting of the Bog Orchid (*Hammarbya paludosa*) was made by Derek Long. Lesser water plantain (*Baldellia*), Heath rush, Bog pondweed and Marsh Arrowgrass presented no problems. In the Cyperaceae we saw Deergrass, two Cotton grass species, Many stalked spike rush; Floating, Bristle and Slender Club-rushes (*Eleogiton*, *Isolepis setacea* and *cernua*); two beak sedges and several unfamiliar sedges. The grass genera included *Nardus*, *Aira*, *Deschampsia*, *Molinia*, *Danthonia* and *Agrostis* - confident enthusiasm changed to cautious and modest hesitancy when discriminating between four or more *Agrostis* species!

The expedition ended at Hatchetts Ponds in the late afternoon. All the participants appreciated the experience of unfamiliar habitats with their unaccustomed species.

J.E.O.

Beginners Guide to losses, Liverworts and Lichens

Rod Stern, a distinguished forester, who in his retirement has become an expert in a more miniscule field, led a group of W.B.S. members through the Savernake Forest with speed, enthusiasm and expertise.

He introduced us to some of the more common species such as *Mnium hornum*, *Hypnum cupressiforme* and *Hypnum undulatum* as well as the more unusual ones. He explained that different trees sustain different communities, the ash and sycamore being particularly good hosts. Communities of lichens and mosses can, in their turn, be good indicators of ancient woodland, for example *Zygodon Baumgartenii* and the fernlike delicate Tamarisk moss (*Thuidium tamariscinum*).

To those unfamiliar with Latin it proved a. tongue-twisting linguistic challenge but also a fascinating and absorbing introduction to a little regarded group of plants.

R.G.

WBS Field Visit to Acres Down and Woodcrates (New Forest) - 9.8.92

A party of around twenty members from as far afield as Gloucestershire assembled at Millyford Bridge for the second of the summers visits to the New Forest. The whole of the Forest is of immeasurable ecological interest and is especially so for Wiltshire residents as its northern edge runs along the county boundary for several miles,

The area that was visited is little frequented by the public and contains a wide range of typical New Forest habitats including ancient beechwood, alder carr, bracken stands, both wet and dry heath, and most importantly an unusual system of valley-side flushes. To the Wiltshire botanist even the most common New Forest plants are exciting and this area is noteworthy for several rare species, including *Gladiolus illyricus* (wild gladiolus), although by the time of the visit flowering was long past.

Fine displays of *Pinguicula lusitanica* (pale butterwort) were especially admired and the much rarer (in the south of the country at least) *Pinguicula vulgaris* (common butterwort) was also found in an exceptionally rich flush that also contained *Pedicularis palustris* (red rattle) and *Eleocharis quinqueflora* (few-flowered Spike-rush). *Hammarbya paludosa* (bog orchid) and *Utricularia minor* (lesser bladderwort) were searched for in vain. There was much discussion of the finer points of the identification of sedges and other Cyperaceae and the distinguishing marks of *Agrostis* spp. (bent grasses) and some of the more common bryophytes and lichens. There were, rather surprisingly, a number of the larger and more obvious fungi in the woodland, presumably encouraged by the generally wet weather. The oyster mushrooms were delicious!

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After lunch a reduced party set off in quest for one of the few populations in the south of Britain of *Phegopteris connectilis* (beech fern), which was located in large quantities around the bases of streamside alder stools. *Galium debile* (slender bedstraw), a New Forest speciality, was found in a dried-up roadside pool.

Non-botanical highlights of the day were several spectacular spiders, including the very large raft spider (*Dolomedes fimbriatus*), and the ever-present. Mediterranean sound of the wood crickets.

P.W.

Programme for Winter 1992/93

1. Saturday, November 21st, 2.00 p.m.

Science Laboratories, Marlborough College. (See below for directions).

An afternoon of Slides and. Discussion.

John Presland will show a selection of his botanical slides.

During a tea/coffee break Dave Green will be available to help with identification problems.

We hope you will voice your opinions as to the future of W.B.S., before a further session of slides belonging to members, so please look out some slides and bring them.

1. Saturday, January 23rd, 2.00 p.m.

Science Laboratories, Marlborough College. (See below for directions).

Jack Oliver will give a talk with slides entitled:-

The Flora of the Upper Reaches of the River Kennet.

2. Saturday, February 27th, 11.15 a.m.

'Eight Walks' Savernake Forest G.R. 225668

Rod Stern - Mosses and. Liverworts

We will collect specimens in the morning, then examine them in the afternoon, having our sandwiches in the meantime.

3. Saturday, March 27th, 2.00 p.m. A.G.M. and Slide

Show - The Museum, Long Street, Devizes.

We are asking for feed-back as to how the W.B.S. can best function for the benefit of existing and potential members. This is an opportunity to help establish the W.B.S. by appointing officers and amending or ratifying our provisional constitution. We will end with a botanical slide show.

Instructions for Finding the Science Laboratories, Marlborough College.

Off the A4, west of Marlborough High Street, G.R.183686.

Turn south off A4 100 yards west of The College Bridge, just west of the Memorial Hall. Continue for 200 yards past the Science Laboratories (ugly flat roofed concrete building). Park in the Parade Ground (single storey building to the left, trees/fields to the right). The main entrance to the Science Laboratories is between the Labs and the Memorial Hall.

Programme for Winter 1992/93 (Continued)

If Marlborough College is rather a distance for you to travel, we apologise and would like to have some meetings further South but have not yet discovered a suitable venue.

Plans for Summer 1993

We are intending to arrange field meetings to suit all interests and levels of ability in the Summer of 1993. We would be happy to have a meeting virtually anywhere in the County at the request of a member, as long as you can suggest somewhere to park, and suggest a 2-3 hour itinerary. The site does not need to include rarities and a Committee member would be happy to help if you do not want to lead it yourself.

Suggestions please to Joy Newton, 1, Grasshills, Aldbourne, Marlborough, Wilts. SN8 2EH. Tel: 0672 40356.

Apart from one or two meetings for enthusiasts further afield, we hope to arrange meetings at the following places:-

Longbridge Deverill - West of Salisbury. Braydon Forest, in the North of the County. Marlborough College - a marshy area.
Chisbury Wood - Near Savernake Forest.
Porton Ranges - Salisbury Plain.
Cotswold Water Park, for aquatic vegetation.

All these meetings will aim to assist those who need basic help in identification, so all are welcome.

Membership

Fifty-one people have joined the W.B.S. since it was formed six months' ago.

Note from the Chairman

Some members have expressed their concern that plant records are no longer being received by the Flora Mapping Project. I would like to explain why this is so. The WFMP was set up solely for the purpose of gathering data for the forthcoming New Flora. The cut-off date for records was the end of 1991, since when the WFMP ceases to exist, at least for data-gathering purposes. The Biological Records Centre only normally accepts records through a county expert or statutory body such as BSBI recorder or English Nature, since some form of verification is needed.

The two BSBI Recorders, however, are always ready to accept and determine records in their own vice-county and forward significant data (such as first and second county records) to the local and national Biological Record Centres. All correspondence will receive a reply if accompanied by SAE.

At present the WBS is not equipped to continue monitoring or updating records from tetrads which members may be continuing to study. If you are doing this work, you are asked to hold on to the more routine records until an opportunity arises for the information to be processed.

Note from the Chairman (Continued)

With Dave's explanation in mind, the Society needs- Regional Co-ordinators to receive and disseminate information. Members continuing records on a personal basis would then have someone to consult and information from them about new B or C recordings could be forwarded to BSBI recorder Dave Green.

Watercourse Survey

Jack Oliver and his team have been working throughout the summer on this project, which Jack will discuss at the January meeting.

Verges

Audrey has encountered some problems but has made headway and hopes to get this project underway in time for next season.

Churchyards

Feedback is needed from Churchgoers who are also botanists. WBS members cannot survey Churchyards or advise on their management until someone has asked them!

Countryside Stewardship Scheme in Wiltshire

The Countryside Stewardship scheme has been launched amidst the current controversy and debate about cereal surpluses and set-aside. This scheme is intended to "combine conservation and public enjoyment of the countryside with commercial farming and land management", and will probably be considerably more effective at improving the environment than programmes that are directed primarily towards the reduction of cereal surpluses. In Wiltshire the scheme is aimed at improving the management of chalk and limestone grasslands and "waterside landscapes", and recreating areas of these habitats in appropriate sites. Many farmers have already enrolled. This scheme is potentially very exciting, and it will be interesting to see how any newly created habitats develop. In order to determine the success of the scheme it is essential that the farms on which work is being carried out are carefully monitored and it is hoped that the Wiltshire Botanical Society will be able to become actively involved in this. All members who are interested in this should contact Andrew Moorhouse, the Wiltshire Farming and Wildlife Group officer at Cromwell House, Market Place, Devizes. Tel: 0380 723431.

Habitat Survey

English Nature and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust will both be involved in this survey and currently have a working party assembling a list of sites of Nature Conservation Importance in Wiltshire. Volunteers will be necessary. Would those people interested please contact Audrey Summers as soon as possible on Marlborough (0672) 810268 or Easton House, Easton Royal, Pewsey. SN9 5LS.

Finally, the names and addresses 0+ the ad hoc committee:-

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