

## WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

(W.B.S.)

NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MRS RITA GROSE, THE SMITHY, SMITHY LANE, WOODBOROUGH, PEWSEY, WILTSHIRE, SN9 5PL. 0672 851244

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## ITEM 1

In order to create a focus for member's ideas, suggestions, letters and articles, the Newsletter Editor's address has been appended at the top of the page. If you have an opinion to express, an idea to suggest or just something you wish to say relevant to the Society, don't hesitate to put pen to paper. The newsletter is there to gather your opinions as well as to disseminate information.

A.G.M. The inaugural A.G.M. was well attended by 30 of our 72 members. The constitution was circulated and ratified, the Society's Officers and the ad hoc Committee were unanimously re-elected. After the official business the meeting adjourned for tea, followed by a slide show and a Willow quiz organised by Barbara Last, Joy Newton and Jack Oliver.

FUTURE VENUES. If you know of an interesting site - not necessarily one containing rare plants - and think other members might like to visit it (or if in doubt) contact Joy Newton (address on the winter programme), and discuss it with her.

MONITORING PROJECTS. There has been a varied response to the 3 Projects with which the W.B.S. is involved. The Rivers and Watercourses project is going steadily ahead and already forming plans for next season. The Habitat Survey report shows that the project has a substantial number of volunteers and a useful Summer Programme was completed. Unfortunately few members have showed interest in the Countryside Stewardship monitoring. This is a pity; as Phil Wilson explains later in the newsletter, this is a scheme which shows the promise of lasting environmental improvement.

REMINDERS. 1. Jack Oliver (0672 861251) would like to receive records of any garden asters found in the wild this season (October). For further information regarding asters please refer to Newsletter 3.

2. If you have come across any large stands of *ONOBRYCHIS VICIIFOLIA* (sainfoin), *ODONITES VERNA* (red bartsia) or *KNAUTIA ARVENSIS* (field scabious) please contact Audrey Summers (0672 810268)  
 Please record location (map reference), habitat and extent of spread for both Jack Oliver and Audrey Summers.

SUBSCRIPTIONS. Some subscriptions are long overdue. If you have not yet paid and wish to remain a WBS member, please send it now to Katie Hill, 31 Malthouse Close, Blunsdon, Swindon, Wiltshire. SN2 4BG (0793 726371)

THE WATSONIA AND THE BSBI NEWS. Please check your magazine racks and see if you are inadvertently holding any of these magazines. If so please return them to Katie Hill as soon as possible as she is re-organising the distribution network.

Finally, I think the quantity and quality of material in this newsletter indicates what a productive and successful year our first year has been, and augurs well for the future.

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POSTSCRIPT FROM YOUR EDITOR. Please make a note NOW of the AGM, listed in the Winter meetings. Saturday 19th March 1994 at 2 pm at The Museum, Devizes.

ITEM 2 SUMMER PROGRAMME REPORT - JOY NEWTON.

An average of 10 members came to our Summer meetings, with the exception of Porton which boasted a grand 25.

We started off with a real treat - Worth Matravers on the Isle of Purbeck - so many rarities, but *OPHRYS SPHEGODES* (early Spider Orchid) was special. Lunch was in an idyllic cove overlooking the sea amongst the flowers and the birds.

The Fivehead Arable Weed Reserve near Taunton was unbelievably full of species which used to be on farms but are now rare; there was even an understorey of *SCANDIX PECTEN-VENERIS* (Shepherd's Needle) over several fields.

The Porton ranges were very popular; a range of habitats, from a vast area dominated by ant-hills, downland and beech woods. *NEOTTIA NIDUS-AVIS* (Bird's nest orchid) and *MONOTROPA HYPOPITYS* (Yellow Bird's nest) were perhaps the highlights.

On Midsummer's Day (with Steve pretending he wasn't cold in shorts) we enjoyed Distillery Meadows, wet and unimproved, blue with *SUCCISA PRETENSIS* (Devil's bit scabious).

The Swindon meeting was at an urban lung - much loved by a few Swindonians who are active in protecting it against the inexorable march of Swindon. They showed WBS members a magnificent *SORBUS TORMINALIS* (Wild Service tree).

Shearwater, on another scorching day was a fascinating area of lake, stream and bogs. Apart from the botanical 'goodies' like *MYOSOTIS SECUNDA* (Creeping Forget-me-not) we found very large fresh water mussels, and it was a good day for butterflies.

Pike Corner in the Cotswold Water Park was a real revelation; a field full of unusual grasses and sedges including *BLYSMUS COMPRESSUS* (Flat sedge) and a wallow in some ponds. Then a look at what must be the most colourful flowery hayfield ever at Clattinger Farm.

The grounds of Marlborough College are delightfully wet and the *SALIX FRAGILIS* (Crack willow) are old. *EPIPHYTES* grow on the old pollarded crowns and we had great fun counting up the species and possibly surpassing the BSBI record with 25 higher plant species.

Cobham Frith is an area of Savernake Forest with *CALLUNA VULGARIS* (Heather) and a wonderful pond. Chisbury Wood came up with 6 different species of *EPILOBIUM* (Willowherbs) to keep us all busy and happy.

Bramshaw Woods on the 27th September is still to come. We hope to see many of you there, and at the Winter meetings.

ITEM 3.

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

WINTER MEETINGS 1993/1994

We welcome members and friends to our meetings.

If you have any queries please contact Joy Newton

Tel.0672 40356 1, Grasshills, Aldbourne, Marlborough, Wilts. SN6 2EH

1. Saturday 13th November 1993. 10.30 am  
Savernake Forest. Meet at Eight Walks G.R.225 668  
Leader Dave Green  
A Winter walk in Savernake Forest.  
We will look at the King and Queen Oaks and branch out to identify some fungi!  
Morning only. Two mile walk.
2. Saturday 20th November 1993 2.00 pm  
Marlborough College Science Laboratories G.R. 183 686  
Talk John Presland  
John Presland will give a slide show -  
The Umbrella Flower - A Look at the Umbellifers.  
There will be a tea interval for discussion and specimen identification.  
See below for directions.
3. Saturday 29th January 1994 2.00 pm  
Marlborough College Science Laboratories G.R. 183 686  
Talk Barbara Last  
Barbara Last will give a slide show -  
Arctic Summer - The Wild Life and Flora of NE Greenland.  
There will be a tea interval for discussion and specimen identification.  
See below for directions.

\*\*\*\*\* ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING \*\*\*\*\*

4. Saturday 19th March 1994 2.00 pm  
Annual General Meeting of the Wiltshire Botanical Society  
at The Museum, Long Street, Devizes.  
After the official business we will have tea and an identification/  
discussion session, and a short slide show.

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5. Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1994 10.30 am  
Leader Rod Stern  
Bryophytes in Savernake Forest. Meet at The Column. G.R.229 648  
Bring lunch. Walk about 1 mile.  
We will collect specimens in the morning and examine them in the Marlborough  
College Science Laboratories in the afternoon.

Instructions for finding the Science Laboratories Marlborough College.

Turn South off A4 - 100 metres West of College Bridge, just West of the Memorial Hall. Continue for 200 metres past the Science Laboratories and park in the Parade Ground. The main entrance to the Science Laboratories is between the Labs and the Memorial Hall.

ITEM 4. RIVERSIDE PLANT (1).HERBACEOUS SPECIES.(EXCLUDING CLIMBERS & SCRAMBLERS)

In 1992 surveys were made on the Rivers Ebbles, Avon and tribut<sup>a</sup>ories (North Wiltshire), Kennet (mainstream) and Kennet (Winterbourne), banks and channels, to list the species present and their frequencies according to the system used by Donald Grose. More than 20 sites, counting banks and channels separately, on the upper reaches of each river were chosen, including some winterbourne or dried-out segments. These measures for each site provide a baseline for future comparisons if the rivers either recover or continue (like the Kennet in 1993) to dry up. Ratios of water to land plants give a more reliable indication of the state of the rivers than measures of transient water flows from rapid run-offs from road and field drains following winter rainstorms or snow melts. Water plants disappear after 3 years drought.

The accompanying table is based on the combined (Grose) totals of frequency for the herbaceous plants (excluding at this stage scramblers and ~~x~~climbers such as the very common Cleavers, Ivy, Bramble and Bellbine, to be charted separately) at all sites together for each of the 4 different projects. It therefore shows the overall commonest channel and bankside species. Most channel sites for the Ebbles, Upper Avon (and tributaries) and Kennet (West of Marlborough) had waterflows in July 1992, but the Kennet Winterbourne (North of Pan Bridge) had no water in winter (apart from transient rainstorm run-offs) except at the site with the dammed-up pond at Uffcote. The Ebbles was surveyed by Jennifer Acornley The Avon and tributaries by Diana Hodgson and team (David Blackford, Judith Robinson and Civil Williamson), and both sections of the Kennet by Jack Oliver.

The dominance of the Stinging Nettle on the banks, and in some channels, is much greater than even the table indicates. For instance the bankside abundance scores for Nettle are almost equal to the combined scores of the 3 next most abundant bankside species together (Rough Meadow-grass, Tall Oat-grass and Reed Canary-grass). However note that Reed Canary-grass (PHALARIS ARUNDINACEA) is the only species which occurs in 'The Top 12' for every one of the 8 sets of sites (4 sets of banks and 4 sets of channels) on the table. From the many differences between findings from riverside surveys by Donald Grose nearly half a century ago (from 1942 - 1954) and now, the Stinging Nettle did not appear on his lists. Neither did Rough Meadow-grass nor Tall Oat-grass which have been invading the rivers (and other watery places) from agricultural land and roadsides. Grose's top 3 were Great Willowherb, Fool's Watercress and Branched Bur-reed. Another great difference will be illustrated in the next issue. Grose's waterside herbs persist, but are very much less in evidence than either the agricultural and wayside grasses, or than riots of riverside smothering climbers and scramblers - Cleavers, Rose, Bellbine, Bramble, Ivy and others.

JACK OLIVER.

THE 12 MOST COMMON RIVERSIDE AND CHANNEL HERBACEOUS PLANTS.  
(Excluding on this table all the climbers and scramblers)

| ORDER OF<br>ABUNDANCE | EBBLE                                   |                           | AVON AND TRIBUTARIES          |                                | KENNET (WINTERBOURNE)      |                            | KENNET (MAINSTREAM)               |                          |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
|                       | BANKS                                   | CHANNEL                   | BANKS                         | CHANNEL                        | BANKS                      | CHANNEL                    | BANKS                             | CHANNEL                  |
| 1st                   | Stinging Nettle                         | Stream Water<br>Crowfoot  | Stinging Nettle               | Reed Sweet-<br>grass           | Stinging Nettle            | Stinging Nettle            | Stinging Nettle                   | Stream Water<br>Crowfoot |
| 2nd                   | Hemlock Water<br>Dropwort               | Stinging Nettle           | Hogweed                       | Reed Canary<br>grass           | Tall Oat-grass             | Rough Meadow-<br>grass     | Rough Meadow-<br>grass            | Reed Canary-<br>grass    |
| 3rd                   | Watercress                              | Reed Canary-<br>grass     | Tall Oat-grass                | Hemlock Water<br>Dropwort      | Couch grass                | Reed Canary-<br>grass      | Reed Canary-<br>grass             | Water Mint               |
| 4th                   | Creeping Thistle                        | Plicate Sweet-<br>grass   | Great Willowherb              | Common Reed                    | Rough Meadow-grass         | Tall Oat-grass             | Great Willowherb                  | Water Starwort           |
| 5th                   | Spear Thistle                           | Watercress                | Dandelion                     | Watercress                     | Cow Parsley **             | Creeping Bent<br>(grass)   | Creeping Thistle                  | Rough Meadow-<br>grass   |
| 6th                   | Water Mint                              | Creeping Bent<br>(grass)  | Meadow -<br>Crane's bill      | Stream Water<br>Crowfoot       | Celandine **               | Broad leaved<br>Dock       | Tall Oat grass                    | Gt. Willowherb           |
| 7th                   | Great Willowherb                        | Hemlock Water<br>Dropwort | Creeping Buttercup            | Branched Bur-<br>reed          | Hogweed                    | Celandine **               | Yorkshire Fog<br>grass            | Fool's<br>Watercress     |
| 8th                   | Perennial Rye-<br>grass                 | Water Mint                | Rough Meadow-grass            | Common<br>Duckweed             | Cock's foot<br>grass       | Great Willowherb           | Wood Dock                         | Water Forget-<br>me-not  |
| 9th                   | Reed Sweet-grass<br>Canary              | Fool's Watercress         | Comfrey                       | Water Mint                     | Creeping Thistle           | Creeping Thistle           | Comfrey                           | Brookline                |
| 10th                  | Creeping Buttercup                      | Water Forget-<br>me-not   | Reed Sweet grass              | Canadian<br>Waterweed          | Broad leaved<br>Dock       | Couch grass                | Couch grass                       | Common<br>Duckweed       |
| 11th                  | Creeping Bent<br>(grass)                | Creeping<br>Buttercup     | Marsh Thistle                 | Reedmace                       | Reed Sweet-grass<br>Canary | Yorkshire Fog<br>(grass)   | Creeping Bent<br>(grass)          | Stinging<br>Nettle       |
| 12th                  | Yorkshire Fog grass<br>& Clustered Dock | Branched Bur-reed         | Reed Canary<br>grass & Teazel | Marsh Thistle &<br>Yellow Iris | Great Willowherb           | Comfrey and<br>Meadowsweet | Cock'sfoot grass &<br>Meadowsweet | Pink Water<br>Speedwell  |

\*\* Inconspicuous or absent above ground in mid - late Summer.

ITEM 5. HABITAT SURVEYING. THE COUNTY WILDLIFE SITES PROJECT.

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As many of you who attended the Inaugural Meeting will know, the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's consultancy, Chalkhill Environmental Consultants are co-ordinating the Wildlife Sites Project. This aims to identify, map and list all so-called second-tier sites (or sites of nature conservation importance) in Wiltshire. They will, in the future be referred to (preferably!) as 'Wildlife Sites', and many of them will be habitat based with the main interest being botanical, although sites with important mammals, birds and invertebrates will also be listed.

Some 20 members have so far kindly offered their help with habitat surveying, with the main season for this being in 1994. Several volunteers have already marked up blank maps with possible sites that they know or remember from their flora mapping trips. This has also helped identify areas which are poorly covered at present.

This summer we arranged several field sessions so that volunteers could get a feel for the sort of quality of grassland or woodland etc, that we are hoping to survey. These sessions were also an opportunity for people to brush up on their identification skills as well as enjoying themselves!

We visited Bentley Wood in late May under the expert guidance of Dr Pat Woodruffe and a bonus for plant lovers was sightings of freshly emerged Marsh Fritillary Butterflies. June saw some rather unsettled weather, and the visit to Grove Farm, Grittenham was no exception! We had also obtained access to Great Wood which is adjacent to Grove Farm meadows. We managed to look at a few meadows and a small part of the wood before being rained off.

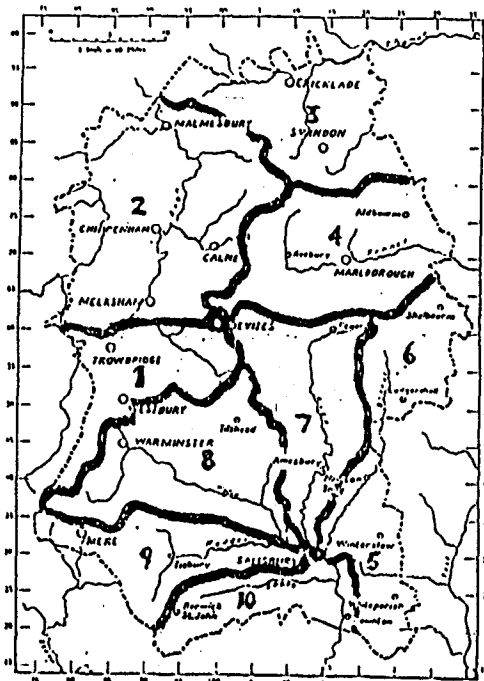
July was much kinder, and the visit to West Yatton Down and Kents Bottom gave a chance to compare quality differences in limestone grassland. Dave Green kindly led a trip to Spye Park which gave fascinating insight into a wide range of habitats and species on this area - surveyed by Donald Grose in 1954.

These were all worthwhile and interesting outings and I would like to thank personally all those who came along. We are at present working on criteria for site selection as well as liaising with organisations such as the C.L.A and N.F.U to ensure that the project and the survey season next year runs smoothly. If you can help, even with just identifying potential sites, please do contact me at the Wiltshire Wildlife TRust Office (0380-725670) or at home (0249-720704)

PAUL DARBY

ITEM 6. DISTRICT CO-ORDINATORS.

- ① Bristol Avon(South). John Presland, 175 Ashley La., Winsley. <sup>BA 15</sup> 2MR
- ② Bristol Avon(North). Diana Hodgson, The Red House, The Green, Christian Matford, Chippenham. 0249 720395.
- ③ Thames. Sylvia Chandler. 1 The Lynch Field, Wanborough, Swindon <sup>SP3 6HT</sup>
- ④ Kennet\*. Malcolm Hardstaff. Bradbourne. Coldharbour Lane. Marlborough. SN8 1BJ. 0672 512029
- ⑤ Test. Pat Woodruffe. Anchorsholme. Hop Gdns. Whiteparish. 0794 884436
- ⑥ Bourne. Audrey Summers. Easton Hse. Easton Royal. Pewsey. 0672 810268
- ⑦ Upper Salisbury Avon. Dorothy Cooper. 8 Scotchel Green. Pewsey. SN9 5AU. 0672 62965
- ⑧ Wylye. Barbara Last. The Stables. Berwick St James. Salisbury. SP3 4TN. 0722 790368
- ⑨ Nadder. Jennifer Acornley. Little Orchard. Coombe Bissett. SP5 4LR. 0722 72462
- ⑩ Ebble & Lower Salisbury Avon. Phil Wilson. 4 Prospect Place. Grove La. Redlynch. SP5 2NT. 0725 20748



WILTS. BOTANICAL DISTRICTS (Grose p. 6)

\* WBS Records Coordinator, District Coordinators have similar functions to W.F.M.P. Coordinators, receiving records helping any new members, & (sometimes) to help with local meetings etc.

## ITEM 7. ESA's, SET-ASIDE AND COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP.

Recent years have seen the introduction of several schemes which may eventually restore some valuable diversity to the British countryside. The chief motivation behind these schemes has been the overproduction of agricultural products especially cereals within the EEC and the cost of the storage of these surpluses, and this has led to the hitherto unheard of release of considerable funds for environmental work. These schemes can however be rather confusing, especially when the regulations and management guidelines appear to change every year!

### 1. Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

These are areas which have been identified as already being of conservation value. They are usually continuous large blocks of land which possess a recognisable landform and a characteristic set of traditional farming practices. In most cases the character of the area is threatened with agricultural change, and the ESA funding is designed to maintain this character by supporting traditional land management. In the Breckland of East Anglia for instance, aid is available for the restoration of heathland and grassland on arable land, and the flora of cultivated areas including such rarities as VERONICA PRAECOX, V.VERNA, SILENE OTITES and MEDICAGO FALCATA is helped by measures directed at field margins. In Wiltshire ESA's already include the Avon Valley south of Salisbury and the chalk downs in the south-west of the county.

### 2. Set-aside.

This is directed primarily at reducing cereal production, and environmental benefits are a secondary aim. New regulations introduced in August do however include provisions for the conservation of uncommon cornfield plants and the restoration of species-rich grassland. Under this scheme all arable farmers are eligible for payments, and in return, all but those with very small farms are required to leave approximately 15% of their fields uncropped. There are many possible options for farmers to follow, the main ones being either to set-aside different parts of the farm each year, or to set-aside the same part in successive years. The first of these options will be of greater benefit to annual plants, and the second will be better for the regeneration of perennial vegetation.

### 3. Countryside Stewardship.

This is aimed directly at individual sites where there is already existing ecological interest which can be enhanced or extended onto surrounding land. It is also directed towards improving public access to farmland for recreation. The sort of work that is eligible for grant aid would be the re-introduction of grazing to derelict chalk grassland, the re-establishment of species-rich grassland on arable land by natural regeneration and grazing or cutting, and the restoration of derelict hedgerows. This scheme probably has the greatest potential for improving ecological diversity and creating features of lasting value.

PHILIP WILSON.