

Newsletter

Issue 10 Autumn 1996

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

It never rains, but.....

When we started this new version of the Newsletter, we were afraid we wouldn't get enough material to fill it. However, thanks to your enthusiastic contributions the predicted drought has become a downpour, particularly after this summer's record number of meetings. Consequently, we have had to postpone some articles till next spring. Apologies to those concerned.

Do please keep contributing for future issues, but when possible, please keep the length down. A good guide would be around 250 words for meeting reports and perhaps 300-350 for other matters. It is, after all, a newsletter, aiming for conciseness and diversity.

But have we got it right? Could we please have your thoughts on changes you'd like to see to the Newsletter in addition to your articles. We could do with a lively letter column.

And finally, sorry we're late with this issue: the last word processor collapsed, and the new technological marvel has taken time: first to find, then to master...

Michael Ponting (167 words !)

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Winter Meetings 1995/6

Saturday 16th November 10am
Chisbury Wood, nr. Great Bedwyn GR273648
Leader: **Dave Green**
'A Winter Walk'
Trees, ferns, acidic woodland
Meet: at entrance to wood NORTH of minor road between A4 and Great Bedwyn
Morning only

Saturday 7th November 2pm
Talk and slide show **Barbara Last**
'Middleton Down - A Wiltshire Reserve'
Marlborough College Science Laboratories
There will be tea and discussion afterwards
(To find science labs, see below)

Saturday 18th January 1997 2pm
Talk and Slide show **Maureen Ponting**
'Plants of the Pyrenees'
Marlborough College Science Laboratories
There will be tea and discussion afterwards
(to find science labs, see below)

Saturday 8th February 2pm
Talk and slide show **John Presland**
'Flowers of Winsley Meadows and Waysides'
Marlborough College Science Laboratories
Tea and discussion afterwards

To find Marlborough Science Laboratories...
Turn SOUTH off A4 WEST of the College bridge, just WEST of the Memorial Hall. Continue for 200m past science labs and park in the parade ground.
The main entrance is between the labs and the Memorial Hall.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday 8th March 1997 2pm
The Museum, Long Street, Devizes
After official business we will have a slide show/quiz by Barbara Last and tea
There is parking behind the Museum.

Stourhead Gardens

15 April

Our Society had its first field meeting of the season at Stourhead Gardens on a warmish April day. Jack Oliver, whose expertise was matched by his enthusiasm, was leader.

Before we made our way into the Gardens, Peter Hall, the head gardener, gave us a short talk about regeneration of trees at Stourhead. If regeneration takes place in the 'right' place, then the tree is allowed to grow, but on the whole regeneration is not encouraged; they have to maintain the stunning views and landscape. Among species which regenerate at Stourhead are:

Acer platanoides (seedlings like cress under tree)

Davidia involucrata

Acer palmatum

A. davidii

A. pseudoplatanus

Magnolia wilsonii

M. sinensis

Tsuga heterophylla

Aesculus hippocastanum

Fagus sylvatica

Fraxinus excelsior

For me, the most valuable aspect of our walk through the gardens was the number of useful tips I picked up on identifying conifers such as the mnemonic for mature cedars:

Cedar of Lebanon - Level branches

Deodar Cedar - Drooping tips to branches

Atlas Cedar - Ascending branches

Also, *Thuja plicata* has a pineapple aroma, *Abies grandis* smells of grapefruit, all Spruce needles have peg-like bases, the cones of *Douglas Fir* have three-pronged bracts, *Tsuga heterophylla* has needles of mixed sizes, and, like most other Tsugas, has small cones, and Pines generally have needles in bundles of 2, 3 or 5.

Apart from conifers a few of the other plants we saw were a wonderful old tulip tree planted in 1791 - the tallest specimen in the British Isles; the oldest tree in Stourhead - an oak with a 24ft girth; *Manna Ash*; *Rhododendron sino-grande*, a remarkable rhododendron with huge leaves and beautiful, creamy-white flowers, and the scented liverwort, *Conocephalum conicum*.

The day proved eventful, with our leader, dressed in white trousers, falling up to his waist into the muddy waters of the lake in his enthusiasm to reach a water plant, the moment being captured in film by Barbara Last. I don't know whether we ever did find out what the plant was.

Soon after this event we met a family with a two year old toddler running all over the place. I can't remember the father's exact words but they were something like - "we've got as much trouble with him (referring to the 2 year old) as you seem to be having with him!" - pointing to our leader.

Jean Wall

Great Bedwyn

May 18

On a very cold wet Saturday afternoon 12 valiant Society members visited woodland at Great Bedwyn. Much of the area had been sympathetically cleared and several ponds had been constructed within the woods.

There was an interesting and beautiful pattern of mixed ground flora: *Endymion non-scriptus* (Bluebell), *Oxalis acetosella* (Wood Sorrel), *Viola riviana* (Dog Violet), and some late *Primula vulgaris* (Primrose). We also found *Veronica montana* (Wood Speedwell), *Saxifraga granulata* (Meadow saxifrage - which I have also heard called "Fair Maids of France"), *Carex remota* and *Carex pillulifera*. We were boldly and confidently led to a large patch of *Colchicum autumnalis* (Autumn Crocus) whose plants were in leaf and showing seed heads.

The ponds contained enormous numbers of tadpoles and we also found *Sparganium erectum* (Branched Bar-reed), *Elodia nuttallii*, *Eleocharis palustris* (Common Spike-rush), *Typha latifolia* (Reed-mace) and *Ranunculus peltatus* (Water Crowfoot). Where the soil was slightly acid, there were several clumps of *Calluna vulgaris* (Heather).

We passed a strange tree, a Sweet Chestnut, damaged by gales, which had been cut three feet from the ground and had then sprouted strongly from the rim of the stool. Later, we passed patches of *Myosotis discolor* (Changing Forget-me-not) and finally we got right down to ground level and examined and discussed the highlight of the afternoon - the low growing tiny plant *Montia fontana* (Blinks).

Rita Grose



ROWDE MILL near Devizes

June 9th

On June 9th, a group of seven, led by Jack Oliver, paid a visit to Rowde Mill by kind invitation of John and Jenni Cholmeley. The pleasantly warm weather and matching reception given us ensured an enjoyable morning. The wetland habitat had not previously been recorded so we were eager to see what we might discover. Near the mill, *Hesperis matronalis*, *Dame's Violet*, was well established and had naturalised the river banks. Further along, the banks became more heavily wooded, but this did not prevent an abundance of *Urtica dioica*, *Common Nettle*, and *Gallium aparine*, *Cheavers*! *Allium ursinum*, *Ramsons*, covered much of the woodland floor within, and a large damp area must have presented a lovely sight earlier in the year, when the mass of *Caltha palustris*, *Marsh Marigold*, was in flower. *Adoxa moschatellina*, *Moschatel*, was prolific on the tops of the river banks.

An unusual sight for most of us was a fine stand of *Aconitum napellus* ssp. *napellus*, *Monkshood*, which must have extended over an area of about 40m x 10m. Other finds included *Oenanthe crocata*, *Hemlock Water Dropwort*, *Comium maculatum*, *Hemlock*; *Carduus crispus*, *Wetted Thistle*; *Veronica montana*, *Wood Speedwell*; & *Sparganium erectum*, *Branched Bur-reed*. *Carex pendula*, *Pendulous Sedge*, was widespread in the wooded areas; *Carex sylvatica*, *Wood Sedge*, was plentiful. Elsewhere, *Carex acutiformis*, *Lesser Pond Sedge*; *Carex remota*, *Remore Sedge* & *Carex hirta*, *Hairy Sedge*, were found. The wood contained mainly native species of trees which formed a long side of a rectangle of land we were looking at, the opposite side being composed of a broad hedge with the driveway to the mill and grassland dividing them. Native trees were again well represented in the hedge and included *Beech*, *Oak*, *Hazel*, *Dogwood*, *Guelder Rose* as well as some introduced ornamentals. Great interest was shown in a tree of most unusual appearance. The eye was drawn to a large number of immature fruits which covered the tree and were like small, curved leguminous pods. The tree's bark, leaf and few remaining flowers suggested *Prunus padus*, *Bird Cherry* -- but what about the pods? A careful search did reveal a few cherry-shaped fruits. Jack suspected that what we were looking at was the work of a gall-forming fungus. He was able to confirm later that this was so, the fungus being *Taphrina padi*. A case of botanists beware - obviously appearances can sometimes be deceptive! What at first glance seemed to be some strange and exotic species did indeed turn out to be an ordinary *Bird Cherry* but with an extraordinary number of gall-deformed fruits. This made an intriguing end to a pleasant morning which was also enlivened by Orange Tip and Painted Lady butterflies and by large numbers of Demoiselle Damselflies.

Gwyneth Yerrington

North Meadow, near Cricklade

12th June

It was a beautiful morning when 9 of us met at North Meadow to look at the flora after the fritillaries. Albert Knott from English Nature led us and explained something of the history and management of the Reserve. He also had a species list and distribution maps which were of great interest and help. The area has been a National Nature Reserve since 1973 and consists of 44ha of ancient meadow grassland. The scientific interest is due to a long and consistent management of winter grazing and late summer hay cut. It was divided into 'lots' owned by the inhabitants of the borough of Cricklade and the drainage ditches and stone markings are still extant; the stones are now 'listed buildings'. The lots probably date from the Inclosure Act of 1814, but it is thought that the regime of grazing and cutting has been almost unchanged for 800 years. The hay is cut in early June after the fritillaries have seeded, and the resultant seed mixture is now marketed by English Nature. The meadow is bounded by the River Churn to the north and the Thames to the south and floods for short periods in winter. The soil is a calcareous clay with a gravelly subsoil which facilitates drainage. During the last war large concrete bollards were placed at intervals over the meadow to deter aircraft from landing; these are now near the entrance.

We proceeded at a snail's pace, *Rhinanthus minor*, turning out to be ssp. *minor*, but the dominant grasses, we suspect, were *Bromus racemosus* and *Bromus commutatus*; we confirmed this on examining them at home. The mixture of *Sanguisorba officinalis* (*Greater Burnet*), *Leucanthemum vulgare* (*Oxeye Daisy*), *Rumex acetosa* (*Sorrel*) and *Ranunculus acris* (*Meadow Buttercup*) was a magnificent sight. *Silaum silaus* (*Pepper Saxifrage*) was nearly flowering, and *Thalictrum flavum* (*Meadow Rue*) was abundant in one area. The River Churn, here very narrow, produced *Ranunculus tricophyllus* (*Thread-leaved Water-crowfoot*) as well as the much more common *Ranunculus penicillatus* ssp. *pseudofluitans*. We also saw a group of *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (*Adder's Tongue Fern*) and found one species not on the English Nature list. *Glyceria x pedicellata* (*Hybrid Sweet-grass*). The sun brought out the butterflies, Common Blue, Small Copper and Orange Tip. The beauty of the meadow is in its infinite variety ... the mixture of species over such a large area is quite magical.

Joy Newton

Meeting at Martin Down

22nd June

Eight members, including three Hampshire residents, met English Nature warden, **David Burton**, on a very cool June morning. Our task was to record in four separate areas of downland in order to update previous lists which were a combination of casuals records and those recorded on a visit by ITE (Institute of Territorial Ecology) last year.

The grazing regimes had differed in the areas and it was particularly interesting, I thought, to compare the turf which had been subjected to annual winter grazing by sheep with that which was grazed only once in three years.

The sheep certainly do a good job in keeping *Bromus erecta* at bay and allowing an interesting sward to develop if given sufficient chance. We were told however that many invertebrate enthusiasts despair of the botanists' ideal of short-turf swards. Fortunately, in a National Nature Reserve the size of Martin Down, there is ample room for all types of management and a great diversity of species can co-exist.

During the course of the day we saw many interesting plants, although no major 'finds' were made. We were able to add significant numbers of plants to the lists for each of the areas to which we were allocated, and some of these plants did not appear to have been recorded anywhere on the part of the site where we were working. In one area alone we added 26 species new to the overall area, and a further 10 which had not previously been recorded in that particular patch. Notable species included: *Gymnadenia conopsea*, *Orchis ustulata* (a group of 50+), *Plantathera chlorantha*, *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and *Serratula tinctoria*. One interesting species occurred on the printed lists we were given - *Euphyllus europ* - not surprisingly we failed to find it, but we were tempted to add *Rafflesia arnoldii* and wait to see it on the computer-generated lists! A new county record!

At one stage in the day, **Jack Oliver** was heard to lament the lack of nettles, but we did manage to find a few on an old bonfire site. All in all, a very pleasant day's work, rewarded by some nice finds and the knowledge that our efforts had been of some use.

Pat Woodruffe

Outing to Somerford Common

26th June

On a hot morning, **Jack Oliver**, **Joy Newton**, **Rita Grose** and **Dick & Barbara Last** accompanied the warden round two compartments in Somerford Common to record the flora. It is a fragment of the ancient Forest of Babylon, once a royal hunting forest. During the 1960s, the great oaks were felled by the owner, the Earl of Suffolk. It was later bought by the Forestry Commission and planted mainly with conifers. However, the wide rides and sunny glades provide good habitat for a variety of species. Now, some areas are cleared on a four year cycle. A part is managed as a reserve for the Wiltshire Trust, mainly for butterflies and especially for the scarce Marsh Fritillary. We did not see any, the imagoes had gone, leaving their progeny to munch the leaves of *Devil's Bit Scabious* which was there in abundance. There were large numbers of common Blue Damsel Flies shimmering in the vegetation. The soil is heavy Oxford clay and was already showing signs of this season's drought and forming deep fissures.

The plants were typical of woodland on an acid soil and several new species were added to the existing list. Among those of interest were the *Bitter Vetch* (*Lathyrus montanus*), growing on a bank. There was a tiny clump of *Adder's Tongue Fern* (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), much concealed under a shrub. The warden showed us a clump of *Dyer's Greenweed* (*Genista tinctoria*), the only one on the Common. This is an interesting plant, growing typically on heavy pasture and producing pollen but no nectar. It was used to yield a good yellow dye and when mixed with Woad and mordanted with alum and calcium sulphate forms a green dye used for wool, leather and linen. It has a bitter taste and its cathartic properties make it useful as a purgative. It was also used for inflammations such as gout and rheumatics.

There was a search for a species of *Potentilla*. *P. reptans* lies prostrate and has 5 petals; *P. erecta* is upright and has 4 petals, but there was much discussion over a possible hybrid with a mixture of 4 or 5 petals. There was a good variety of sedges: *Carex hirta*, *flacca*, *obtrubae pendula* and *pilulifera*. This last caused some amusement as its diagnostic features were a tall male on top followed by a group of round females. It was somewhat reminiscent of a group of botanists I know!

Barbara Last

WINSLEY WALK

23 June

The parish of Winsley has a rich and varied flora, arising from a range of different habitats. Basically limestone, with characteristic meadows, woodland and verges. It also has interesting old walls. The Avon Valley cuts through it, amounting on one stretch almost to a gorge and providing river, canal and marsh flora. Because of the season and the need to select, we ignored the wetland habitats and concentrated on the others.

Led by John Presland, we began with a walk through a shady wood, a mixture of native and planted trees, but with a characteristic range woodland grasses and sedges, including the uncommon *Wood Meadow-grass* (*Poa nemoralis*) and *Drooping Sedge* (*Carex pendula*). Of particular interest among the flowers was the *Yellow Strawberry* (*Duchesnea indica*) with yellow flowers (and, later, tasteless red strawberry fruits), introduced into gardens from the Himalayas as a curiosity but run wild here on some scale.

Emerging into a narrow lane, we came upon *Bath Asparagus* (*Ornithogallum pyrenaicum*), a rarity nationally but fairly common in the countryside round Bath - and certainly in Winsley. A variety of other plants seen here included *Great Mullein* (*Verbascum thapsus*) and *Field Madder* (*Sherardia arvensis*).

On coming out from the lane, we found ourselves on Winsley Hill, part of the B3108, the main road through Winsley. Here a protected verge housed many interesting plants - *Ploughman's Spikenard* (*Inula conyzae*), *Small Scabious* (*Scabiosa columbaria*), *Yellow-wort* (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) *Cypress Spurge* (*Euphorbia cyparissias*) - undoubtedly ejected from a nearby garden; *Marjoram* (*Origanum vulgare*), *Wild Basil* (*Clinopodium vulgare*), *Giant Horsetail* (*Equisetum telmateia*) - presumably indicating an underground watercourse under what appeared to be dry, well-drained soil. *Deadly Nightshade* (*Atropa belladonna*), *Common Rockrose* (*Helianthemum nummularia*), *Wall Pepper* (*Sedum acre*), *Common Gromwell* (*Lithospermum officinale*), *Pyramid Orchid* (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), *Bee Orchid* (*Ophrys apifera*), *Common Spotted Orchid* (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), a purple spotted *Hieracium*, *Common Milkwort* (*Polygala vulgaris*), and *Common Restharrow* (*Ononis repens*). Later in the year, *Felwort* (*Gentianella amarella*) will be seen here, and *Common Centaury* (*Centaureum erythraea*) and *Fairy Flax* (*Linum catharticum*) are normally to be seen.

We returned to the lane, but immediately left it for a footpath, which soon revealed below it an overgrown meadow, with *Pyramid Orchid* (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), *Sanfoin* (*Onobrychis viciifolia*), *Horseshoe Vetch* (*Hippocrepis comosa*), *Common Rockrose* and *Yellow Rattle* (*Rhinanthus minor*). This meadow has been neglected for years, but the Parish Council are now considering leasing it and managing it as a nature reserve.

Continuing along the footpath we passed a solitary plant of *Lucerne* (*Medicago sativa ssp sativa*) and another of *Common Helleborine* (*Epipactis helleborine*), neither in flower, and some more *Wood Meadow Grass*, before returning to our cars by another route through the wood. On the way we passed some caves which have been given SSSI status because of their Great Horseshoe Bats.

After lunch in a field kindly provided by Jean Maitland, we drove to Stillmeadow, Wiltshire Trust nature reserve situated in a garden which is as interesting as the the reserve itself. Under a tree bordering the lawn we saw a large specimen of *White Helleborine* (*Cephelanthera damasonum*). Under another of these trees *Autumn Ladies' Tresses* (*Spiranthes spiralis*) appeared some years ago, but not since. In a grassy part of the garden allowed to grow uncut there were many *Pyramid Orchids*, two *Bee Orchids* and much *Yellow Rattle*. The reserve itself had extremely abundant *Pyramid Orchid* and occasional *Common Spotted Orchids*, together with other limestone grassland plants. In another area of the garden viewed on the way out, were two plants of *Coral Spurge* (*Euphorbia corallioides*), presumably a relic of cultivation, though no one admits to cultivating it.

We made our way by car to another meadow, where a steep bank of unimproved grassland houses a variety of interesting plants. In particular, we found *Long-stalked Cranesbill* (*Geranium columbinum*), *Wild Clary* (*Salvia horminioides*) - unfortunately not in flower; *Basil Thyme* (*Clinopodium acinos*), *Houndstongue* (*Cynoglossum vulgare*), *Vervain* (*Verbena officinalis*), *Thyme-leaved Sandwort* (*Arenaria serpyllifolia ssp. serpyllifolia* and *ssp leptoclados*) and *Common Broomrape* (*Orobancha minor*), which is parasitic on clover and other plants. Pam Slocombe, who with her husband Ivor owns the site, kindly met us and told us something of its history, including identifying the main track through it as the old coach road from Bath to Bradford-on-Avon.

Finally, we walked into the village of Turleigh, observing a variety of wall plants on the way - *Pellitory -of-the-Wall* (*Parietaria judaica*), *Ivy-leaved Toadflax* (*Cymbalaria muralis*), *Red Valerian* (*Centranthus ruber*), *Wall-rue* (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), *Rusty Back* (*Ceterach officinarum*), *Maidenhair Spleenwort* (*Maidenhair Spleenwort* (*Asplenium trichomanes*) - and at the foot of a wall the rare *Round-leaved Cranesbill* (*Geranium rotundifolium*), not uncommon in the parish of Winsley. In an old orchard, we were shown a large colony of *Leopard's Bane* (*Doronicum pardalianches*).

Members were impressed with the great variety of plants found, particularly the verge on Winsley Hill which some said was the richest they had seen.

John Presland

The New Forest

Saturday 6 July

A group of eight people met near Holmsley disused station in the rain. Luckily, this soon stopped and sunny intervals continued till after lunch. We were fortunate in having Vera Scott as leader as she is very well acquainted with the area.

We started to explore wet meadows near the Avon Water and were shown *Acorus calamus* (*Sweet Flag*) growing on the bank. Vera thought this could have been misconstrued in the notices of the meeting as *Cyperus longus* (*Galingale*) which is nowhere near the area. We were able to compare all three aquatic species of *Myosotis* (*Forget-me-not*). In the stream we found *Callitriche hamulata* (*Intermediate Water-Starwort*). Near the main road, *Rosa stylosa* (*Short-styled Field-rose*) and *R. micrantha* (*Small-flowered Sweet-briar*) were growing. The latter is common in the New Forest and was seen in several places. Later in the morning we tried to identify *R. obtusifolia* (*Round-leaved Dog-rose*) which is known to occur near the railway track. The most likely candidate appeared to have some introgression from *R. canina* (*Dog-rose*). It was too early for ripe fruit which would have helped. At the edge of a wet meadow were *Potentilla palustris* (*Marsh Cinquefoil*) and *Menyanthes trifoliata* (*Bogbean*).

We followed the edge of Holmsley Inclosure and saw a good selection of plants typical of wet and dry habitats of the New Forest including *Platanthera bifolia* (*Lesser Butterfly Orchid*), *Dactylorhiza maculata* ssp. *ericetorum* (*Heath Spotted-Orchid*) and *Radiola linoides* (*Allseed*). Near a stream and forest track there were *Juncus tenuis* (*Slender Rush*), probably introduced long ago by vehicles, and *Catabrosa aquatica* (*Whorl-grass*).

After passing Holmsley Passage, several plants of *Gladiolus illyricus* (*Wild Gladiolus*) were found. One was showing flower buds, but none was fully open. In Holmsley Bog, one plant of *Sarracena purpurea* (*Pitcherplant*) was flowering. It had been introduced from an unknown source about 1987 and has persisted.

We returned along the railway track which is covered with thin sandy turf. Near the site of the old station were *Trifolium striatum* (*Knotted Clover*) and *Ornithopus perpusillus* (*Bird's-Foot*) and, on a traffic island, *Trifolium arvense* (*Hare's Foot Clover*).

Near the Avon Water close to the main road were two large patches of *Thelypteris palustris* (*Marsh Fern*) and in the bog *Osmunda regalis* (*Royal Fern*).

After a late lunch, most people had other commitments and heavy rain started, so the afternoon meeting was cancelled.

Roger Veall

Pewsey Down Nature Reserve

July 11th

On a surprisingly cold and windy day, a dozen members walked across Knap Hill to endeavour to record the presence of *Tuberous Thistle*. We had hoped to have an expert from English Nature to lead us, but he never turned up!

In the event, we were rather foxed, as the plants we found were still low in the ground and the buds unopened. They were certainly not *Stemless Thistles* (*Cirsium acaulon*) as the rosette of leaves was not at all prickly, but they could have well been hybrids. It was decided to come back in a few weeks' time to try and make a positive identification.

We then walked down the lower track, enjoying numerous flowers and butterflies. *Common Rockrose* was abundant on the steep slopes and we found several *Round-headed Rampion*, *Rest Harrow*, *Small Scabious* (*S. columbaria*) and in the cornfield at the bottom, some rather interesting weeds. The views were, as always, excellent.

Moir Robertson

Tuberous Thistle on Pewsey Down NNRa follow-up to the Pewsey Down meeting

I first 'discovered' the *Tuberous Thistle* on Pewsey Down Nature Reserve in 1992 and noted it again in the following year. I was unaware at that time that there is a hybrid form. Since reading Sue Everett's article in the Flora I am wiser and was looking forward to the outing on July 16th and having some more knowledgeable botanists confirming or disagreeing with my identification.

As Moira Robertson's report explains, this was not to be, as there was a dearth of mature plants and no further inspections have been possible as on the two occasions when I have visited the site since July the area has been grazed by cattle and there were still no mature specimens.

Perhaps members would be interested in a brief description of the plant, written from memory and from a photograph taken at the time. The site is good chalk downland facing south-west where *Round-headed rampions*, *Sawwort*, *Betony* and *Dwarf Thistles* grow. The (?) *Tuberous Thistle* plants formed a fairly large clump standing about 30cm high with several smaller clumps or single plants nearby. The plant was branched with rather soft spiny leaves. In the photograph the receptacle could be described as rounded, but the flower head is not fully out. The stem is certainly cottony-looking, but it is impossible to tell whether the hairs are arachnoid - the second characteristic of the true *Tuberous thistle*. I found the tubers at the base of the stem, photographed them and was delighted to have found what I took to be a true *Tuberous Thistle*.

Rita Grose

THATCHAM REED BEDS

July 14

Four members of the Society met at Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre for a delightful all-day ramble, led by **Malcolm Storey**.

We first explored the lake outside the Discovery Centre, noting the different trees and shrubs bordering the lake, including *Alnus glutinosa* and *A. cordata* growing side by side and 6 different species of willow. We admired a good clump of *Picris echioides* (*Bristly Ox-tongue*) at the edge of the lake.

After lunch we walked through the reed beds. The most interesting discovery made by the group ... multi-coned stems of *Marsh Horsetail* (*Equisetum palustre* -- see article on page 11). Malcolm pointed out the Essex Skippers which were hovering over the brambles. One of the reed beds was quite spectacular, with *Thalictrum flavum* (*Common Meadow-rue*) in full flower.

We walked as far as the canal where we came to a full stop opposite a *Wetted Thistle* (*Carduus crispus*) when it was time to retrace our steps. At the end of the day, Malcolm listed no less than 136 taxa.

Maureen Ponting



Meadow Rue
(*Thalictrum flavum*)

A Cotswold Beech Hangar

Westridge Wood, Wootton-under-Edge
27th July

We were thirteen and lucky; the sun had appeared after overnight rain and the day remained fine. We were met by **Clare** and **Mark Kitchen** and taken first to a steep beech-covered hillside to see *Small-leaved Lime* (*Tilia cordata*), of which there were several and whose scent wafted up on the breeze. In the nearby Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Reserve we were shown the rare *Limestone Woundwort* (*Stachys alpina*). To ensure its survival, members of the Trust tend it by propagation and cultivation of the soil. A shield bug associates with this plant. As a Marbled White fluttered by we watched a Humming Bird Hawkmoth working over thistle flowers.

Further east, the trees give way to open grassland - Coombe Hill SSSI. The managed grazing allows a wealth of flora among the fine grasses, including *Clustered Bellflower* (*Campanula glomerata*), *Betony* (*Betonica officinalis*), *Carlina Thistle* (*Carlina vulgaris*) and *Ploughman's Spikenard* (*Inula conyza*). A single-file track helped us to traverse the steep hillside whose gradient was such that our number could easily have slipped below thirteen had anyone been unlucky. Resting for lunch, we peered down several hundred feet to the terraces of what must have been a Roman vineyard. Lower still were the rooftops of the town known locally as "Wotton-undridge".

Clothing the steep sides and flat top of the great hill is Westridge Wood. There grows here a unique bramble, *Rubus bucknalli*; it grows nowhere in the world except in this wood and its immediate vicinity. Among its many other treasures are *White Helleborine* (*Cephalanthera damasonium*), *Angular Solomon's Seal* (*Polygonatum odoratum*), *Lily-of-the-Valley* (*Convallaria majalis*) and *Wood Barley* (*Hordelymus europaeus*); *Deadly Nightshade* plants (*Atropa belladonna*) are frequently removed by the visiting public, perhaps for reasons of safety. A fine sight was a *Hogweed*, visited by a painted Tiger.

Altogether we spent an enjoyable day of great interest and variety.

Jean Maitland

FLORA 2000

In the Spring 1996 edition of the Newsletter, Dave Green gave details of the latest national botanical recording project, **Flora 2000**. The BSBI has published further information about what is required from those sending in records for this project (*BSBI News, April and Sept 1996*).

When submitting records, botanists are asked to include a code number for each species. These numbers, called BRC Numbers, are assigned by the Biological Records Centre at Monks Wood. Jack Oliver has a supply of record cards which include BRC numbers.

The minimum information required is BRC Number and 10km Grid square. Ideally, records should include the following information: BRC Number, Species, distribution status, vice-county, grid reference, recorder, date, locality. Most of these items are self-explanatory.

Species: Latin name (common name optional)

Vice-County: vc7 (N. Wilts) or vc8 (S. Wilts), the boundary being the Kennet & Avon Canal.

Grid Reference: For Hectad (10km square) records prefix the grid reference with two letters to identify the 100km square. In Wiltshire the letters are ST or SU (see Landranger or Pathfinder OS maps).

Recorder: It helps to sort out who is who if you include initials and preferably titles when giving your name.

Locality: When giving localities, please use names on the Ordnance Survey maps and follow their spelling. Names of houses should be put in inverted commas unless they appear on maps.

Distribution Status is an attempt to define the status of alien species. Native and nationally established alien species (e.g. Sycamore) are to be recorded without comment. Other alien species need to be distinguished by one of the following letters after the name:

A Covers any alien. If more detailed information is available, the following letters can be used:

E Established (a taxon which has been present in the wild for at least 5 years and is spreading vegetatively or is effectively reproducing by seed).

S Established (a taxon which has been present in the wild for at least 5 years but neither spreading vegetatively nor reproducing effectively from seed).

C Casual (present briefly, ie for less than 5 years, or intermittently).

P Planted deliberately in a "wild" situation, not established.

If you are in doubt about a plant's status, note it on your cards, giving as much information as you can. For further details see BSBI News 72.

Wiltshire records will be stored in the Devizes Museum files. Jack Oliver can supply lists of species known to exist within each 10km square. We are interested in finding **additions** to these lists. Records should be submitted by Oct 31 in each year, in the first instance to **Malcolm Hardstaff** who will collate records and check problems with the two Vice-County Recorders, **Dave Green** (vc7) or **Ann Hutchinson** (vc8). They are ultimately responsible for the verification of Wiltshire plant records.

Malcolm Hardstaff
(Recorder WBS)

If you have any queries or suggestions for the future, please contact:

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