



# Newsletter

issue 12 Autumn 1997

## WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

### Winter Meetings 1997/8

Saturday 10 January 1998 2.00pm  
*EPIPHYTIC ORCHIDS OF NORTHERN  
INDIA*

Talk and slide show: Jeremy Wood  
Marlborough College science laboratories  
A talk on the biology of epiphytic orchids,  
with slides of orchids in the wild &  
cultivated in Jeremy's garden in Assam  
see over for directions Tea and  
discussion afterwards

Saturday 31 January 2.00pm  
*WILTSHIRE WILD PLANTS IN AND  
NEAR WATER*

Talk and slide show: John **Presland**  
Marlborough College science laboratories  
see over for directions  
Tea and discussion afterwards

Saturday 14 February 2.00pm  
*FLOWERS OF ISRAEL*

Talk and slide show: **Barbara Last**  
Marlborough College science laboratories  
see over for directions Tea and  
discussion afterwards

**Sunday 8 March 2.30pm GR: SU242235**  
*A GARDEN OF HELLEBORES*

Leader: Jeremy Wood  
Lower House, Whiteparish  
Jeremy has a National Collection of  
Hellebore species and cultivars. The  
afternoon will start with a talk on their  
origins and how to hybridise them, followed  
by a walk around his comprehensive  
collection. We have been invited to tea  
afterwards. For directions to Whiteparish,  
see below

#### Directions :

From Salisbury take the A51t to Uffington. At the junction  
Turn LEFT on A27 at traffic lights signed Romsey  
& Whiteparish: Lower House is 1.5km from lights  
at west side of Whiteparish, on North of road,  
opposite white bungalows: Park at Lascar  
Electronics, 100m to East:  
From East take A27 to Whiteparish, pass Church  
on left; park at Lascar Electronics on right. Lower  
House is 100m on right at West end of village:

**Marlborough College Science Labs** are 120m  
West of the bridge over the A4 at the  
West end of Marlborough Turn South into the car park  
and our actual lab is  
immediately behind the large Memorial Hall:

### Announcing **Wiltshire Botany**

- - - - *our new Scientific Journal*

The Society, as forecast in previous  
*Newsletter* issues, has launched its new  
Journal - **Wiltshire Botany**. Individual  
members and member families are each  
being sent a copy of the first issue, free  
of charge, with the *Newsletter*.

The new journal, which will be an  
occasional publication, is intended for  
articles on or closely related to Wiltshire  
botany which are more technical or  
detailed than those in the *Newsletter*, but  
still of interest to the general reader.

The *Newsletter* will continue to be  
published twice a year, providing news  
about the Society and its activities and a  
digest of relevant botanical information:

*Further copies of the Journal are available at the  
Offices of WILTSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST,  
18/19 High Street, Devizes SN10 1AT Tel: 01380)  
725670. Cost: £2.00 if collected, £250 by post.  
Cheques should be made out to Wiltshire Botanical  
Society, NOT to the Trust.*

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Saturday 14 March 2.00pm

*The Museum, Long Street, Devizes*  
After official business we will have a  
short quiz/slide show by Maureen &  
Michael Ponting, followed by tea,  
Parking behind Museum,

## Two Visits to Clattinger Farm

27 April and 14 June

We were blessed with fine weather for the two visits to *Clattinger*, one of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's most recent acquisitions, bought with financial help from English Nature, North Wiltshire District Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund:

Clattinger Farm is very close to the Gloucestershire border near Oaksey -- 148 acres of hay meadows and pasture in the floodplain of the Swillbrook, part of the Upper Thames. Already a *Site of Special Scientific Interest* and *Special Area of Conservation* (a European designation), this is one of Britain's largest blocks of species --rich unimproved neutral grassland -- and naturally a paradise for botanists !

The first visit attracted no fewer than 28 people (including children). Uncommon plants such as Adder's Tongue and Great Burnet were widespread and a few of the site's many Greenwinged Orchids were also located. Far more uncommon -and classified as a *British Red Data Book* species -Downy-Fruited Sedge was found alongside a drainage ditch: We estimated that there were about 100 of this very special rarity:

Two of the riverside fields are home to Snake's Head Fritillaries which were much more prevalent in this part of the Upper Thames before widespread gravel extraction and agricultural intensification: We noted several groups of Fritillaries, though most were past their flowering best.

We also found Meadow Saffron, now extremely unusual in meadow habitats in the county, and Dyer's greenweed, Saw-wort and Pepper Saxifrage, not to mention several mature native Black Poplars along the banks of the Swillbrook.

The mid-June visit attracted about half the number of the first visit, but more plants were in flower, including some of Clattinger's more unusual residents... it's unusual to see so much Fairy Flax in hay meadows, and undoubtedly the underlying calcareous gravels are part of the explanation. Indeed, the site must have subtly varying soils and geology which, together with differences in past management, have produced twelve fields each with its own particular collection of plant communities:

Twenty-three grass species were noted and along with Meadow Thistle, Distant Sedge and Common Milkwort, were a worthy build-up to the Clattinger speciality, Burnt Orchid. Clattinger is the only hay meadow site in the county to boast this nationally scarce plant. The underlying gravels are again probably part of the reason why this plant grows here. Some fourteen spikes were counted, though the Reserve Warden has seen many more this year:

For those who have yet to make the trip north to Clattinger, it is not to be missed ---- make it

Paul Darby

## Biss Wood

7th May

We were led by **Gilbert Green** who has owned Biss Wood since late 1984 when it was very neglected. Old records trace the wood to and beyond the Domesday Book when it formed part of a much larger wood known as Red Kay which extended almost to Trowbridge,

For centuries managed as coppice with standards - the coppice being Hazel, Field Maple, Ash and some Oak, and the standards Oak - the wood was completely felled around 1930, with the exception of a few scattered Oaks now about 100 years old: The stumps were allowed to grow back to unproductive woodland until about 40 years ago when threequarters was grubbed up and converted to agriculture. The remainder was let for shooting, and apart from widening two rides, nothing else was done till it was purchased by Mr Green.

Since then he has made much progress, felling small areas at a time and either replanting with Oak, Ash or Wild Cherry or allowing natural regeneration to recreate the earlier patchwork. To encourage wildlife, shrubs such as Hawthorn, Guelder Rose and Buckthorn have been planted round the edges of newly-cleared areas, glades have been opened up and a pond constructed. It is amazing how much of this work Gilbert Green has done himself -- the wood was after all bought to give himself something to do in retirement!

Considering the history of destruction and neglect, the diversity of flora is also amazing. On our visit, Bluebells and Early Purple Orchids were prolific in bloom & the mass of primroses just going over.

Other typical woodlanders included Common Violets, Three-veined Sandwort, Herb Bennet, Lesser Celandine, Goldilocks, and three Ferns: Male, Broad Buckler and Heart's Tongue: Numerous Greater Butterfly Orchids were coming up to flowering in one glade: In two recently cleared areas, Wood Anemones had appeared for the first time since the wood's purchase: Evidently they had been able to survive in some form till conditions were right for them to flourish:

The pond proved interesting, sited on what had been a drainage area: A few plants such as Hemlock Waterdropwort had been introduced, but others had either spread in from the wood or fields (Cuckoo Flower, Teazle, Creeping Jenny) or had been accidentally introduced with gifts of frogspawn or planted by friends: Thus we found leaves of Greater Spearwort, Water Plantain, Fringed Water-lily, Water Mint and Burreed, Curled Pondweed and an unidentified Starwort: **Jack Oliver** took specimens of the latter to grow on.

Altogether an enjoyable morning, and the rain held off until it was over !

Gwyneth Yerrington

The "Starwort" turned out to be  
*Crassula helmsii*, says Jack

## CHERHILL DOWN

July 1st

By a stroke of good luck our group of 10 found a dryish slot between local cloudbursts to view the midsummer flora when they climbed up Cherhill Down on the evening of July 1st.....

At the start of the steep chalk track, the moist conditions brought out the full scent of the Sweetbriar Rose, *Rosa rubiginosa* and the hybrid with Dog Rose, *Rosa canina*: There were a few late Common Spotted Orchids beside the track and a solitary Round-headed Rampion, *Phyteuma orbiculare* (*P. tenerum*): We found many more on top of the Down, as well as just two Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*).

*Thesium humifusum* was very plentiful on top of the hill, the tiny start flowers standing proud above the leaf cushion:

**Leaders Joy Newton and Maureen Ponting** had promised butterflies - a tall order, considering the overcast skies and unseasonably cold conditions: It seemed unlikely that anything could take to the wing, but we were incredibly fortunate to find a newly-hatched group of 12 Marbled White butterflies swing from grass stalks and flexing their wings - all males.

An Adonis Blue was also found on some Horseshoe Vetch and sat obligingly on Steve Whitworth's finger long enough for us to admire its finer points: A caterpillar of the Common Blue was also found and there was an abundance of the brilliantly red-spotted Burnet Moths hanging below the flower heads of both Rampion and Knapweed:

A fenced area of Juniper on the southern slope was explored. This would have showed at better effect had the weather been sunny: The grasses on the National Trust land were in full flower and unusually long - despite the grazing of a herd of Friesian cows: The profusion of fungi also reflected an extremely wet June:

A sudden downpour hastened our sliding descent back to the cars, while a broad rainbow promised (perhaps) sunnier days on the Down.

Chris Wheare

*We welcome members'  
friends to our meetings,  
beginners and experts alike*

## Waterways in the Limpley Stoke Valley

near Bradford on Avon, 27th July

Eleven members enjoyed an interesting outing looking at the flora along the Kennet and Avon Canal in the morning and along the Bristol Avon after lunch:

I suppose the plants we remember most vividly after an outing are the ones not normally encountered in our home territory, so for me the highlight of the canal walk was the spectacle of lovely patches of Small Teasel along the bank. It was also a pleasant surprise to see Greater Dodder growing along the banks of the River Avon. It's been a long time since I've seen this plant and I didn't know it grows here. On looking in *The Flora of Wiltshire* later, it was just as Grose described at all those years ago - 'thriving on nettles near the Bristol Avon along the last few miles of its course in Wiltshire'. It is encouraging to report that this fascinating little plant is still holding its own in this area: Other plants seen in or on the banks of the river were: Water Plantain, Trifid Burimarigold, Celery-leaved Buttercup, *Potamogeton crispus* and the Red Data Book species, *Potamogeton nodosus*, also known to Grose in this area.

Our leader, **John Presland**, gave us useful tips on identifying Hypericums and Epilobiums: This sort of personal communication is invariably useful as someone else always seems to know of a way of identifying a particular species that you have never heard of before !

Jean Wall

## NEW ARBORETUM, CLATFORD

29th July

There were 12 attenders on a hot humid day, with some trouble from swarms of tiny Phorid flies at times, seemingly strongly attracted to insect repellent cream !

Only a small proportion of the 200+ tree species was seen, as we kept up on the chalk bunds (banks) because of the humidity. Here the main collection consisted of Limes or Lindens (*Tilia spp.*), about three-quarters of the world's species: We also saw some Eucalypts from mountains in Tasmania and the Australian Alps (Blue Mountains). This genus has about 550 species, and there are more species of tree in the large - mainly Australian - family of Myrtaceae as a whole than in virtually all the Northtemperate tree families together, including all the conifers, Oaks, Willows and Poplars !

We did not have time to see the trees from the Royal Edinburgh Botanic Garden Conifer Conservation expeditions, and the group did not feel like tackling the collection of native and endemic Sorbi. However, we were entertained by the dramatic threat displays of two large Puss-moth caterpillars, spotted by Jean Wall, feeding voraciously on the leaves of a female native Black Poplar.

Jack Oliver

## Cherhill Down 2

5th August

On 5th August, 15 members congregated at Calstone Wellington, near Cherhill, for a walk to Calstone Down, led by Joy Newton and **Maureen Ponting**.

The predicted rain was holding off as we ventured into a series of steep-sided valleys of flora-rich downland.

In places, almost the predominant plant was Roundheaded Rampion ! Saw-wort, Clustered Bell-flower and Autumn Gentian were other noteworthy plants. And a pure white Bell-flower was a novelty to all of us.

The most isolated valley was home to the endangered Wart-biter Cricket, but unfortunately the only contender we found had the short antennae of a grasshopper !

After ten of the party turned for home, the remaining five walked up to a dew pond and then had lunch. Obviously John Presland's mind wasn't on his stomach, as he spotted a single clump of possible Tuberous Thistle. It keyed out as pure *C. tuberosum* in Stace, but the stems were rather short. I later heard that it was the hybrid *C: tuberosum x acaule* which is well known in this area of downland.

**Simon Young**

## Greenham Common

August 17th

Led by Malcolm Storey, about ten of us met the Greenham Common warden to explore some of the newly released Common. Vast concrete runways are being 'mined' for valuable building material so that full restoration to original common land can be achieved.

Near a former runway which is now a great scar of yellow gravel (soon to be carefully and fully restored) the original heathland plants now mingle with calcareous plants which benefit from the weathering of concrete. This area was a blaze of colour: purple Heather with Dwarf Gorse (*Ulex minor*) predominating; with Wild Carrot, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Viper's Bugloss, Kidney Vetch, Common Centaury, Blue Fleabane, Perforate St John's-wort, Greater Knapweed, Mouse-ear Hawkweed and larger Hieraciums along with many Oak saplings (some Turkey Oak). Here the Grayling butterfly and many Blues were enjoying the warm sunshine:

Further on, a wide area of grassland, not now mown and not grazed, had Meadow-sweet, Oxeye Daisy, Hairy Tare, Great Burnet, Cowslip, Hieraciums - and a large fat sulphur-yellow spider which 'adopted' one of us,

We were shown the (disused) missile silos which, along with the control tower, will probably be kept as historical monuments.

The huge task of runway removal, soil replacement and the dismantling of the boundary fence will enable this area to integrate with woodland and wetland to the North,

Philip Terry

## FUNGUS FORAY

Savernake Forest 18th October

On a surprisingly bright and warm morning, 16 members and friends met in Postern Hill car park. After an introduction by Peter Marren, the cortege departed, discovering Honey Fungus (*Armillaria mellea*), and the Common Parasol (*Lepiota procera*), demonstrating its double ring on the stem. The umbrella-like Inkcap (*Coprinus*) showed its deliquescent habit, and we saw Candle- Snuff Fungus (*Xylaria hypoxylon*) looking like flattened-out spent matches. Two adjacent stumps: one sporting a small Bracket Fungus (*Coriolus*), with neat greenish rings, on the other, the purple gelatinous *Ascocoryne*. On leaving this area we were rewarded by a true slime mould growing on twigs on a bank: Further away, we encountered the Sulphur Tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*), and a fine fasciated specimen of *Mycena galericulata* with two stems joined together: Some people were persuaded to taste the juice from the Milkcap in its slimy form (*Lactarius blennius*), waiting a few seconds for its unpleasant burning taste:

The beautiful red Fly Agaric, *Amanita muscaria*, was discovered growing beneath birches.

It was explained how 'liquid flypaper' could be produced by mixing this fungus with milk. Other morning finds included *Ramaria stricta* and *Polyporus badius* on Elder. One of Savernake Forest's famous large Hawthorns boasted a whole colony of Bracket Fungus (possibly *Coriolus versicolor*).

Some fungi from Jean Wall's afternoon list:

*Collybia peronata* Wood Woolly-foot

*C butyracea* Butter Cap

*Meripilus giganteus* Giant Polypore

*Lycoperdon pyriforme*

*Coprinus impatiens*

*Lepiota konradii*

*Mutinus caninus* Dog Stinkhorn

*Oudemansiella mucida* Porcelain Fungus

*Lactarius turpis* Ugly Milk-cap (turpentine smell)

*Paxillus involutus* Brown Rollrim

*Tricholoma ustale*

*Russula xerampelina*

*Xylaria polymorpha* Dead Man's Fingers

*Clitocybe flaccida* Tawny Funnel Cap

*Mycena galopus*

*Laccaria amethystea* Amethyst Deceiver

Thanks to **Peter Marren** and **Malcolm Storey** for a wonderful expedition that excited all the senses.

**Martin Cragg-Barber**

*For further information on meetings, contact Joy Newton*

*1 Grasshills, Aldbourne,  
Marlborough SN8 2EH  
Tel: (01672) 540356*

## New Parish Nature Reserve Project

An exciting new nature conservation project has been set up by Winsley Parish Council to establish its own nature reserve, using funds from the Rural Action Scheme helped by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

The prospective reserve is a meadow in part of the parish called Murhill, to be bought from the Health Authority. Unlike most British meadows, it has never been ploughed or sprayed, perhaps because it slopes so steeply, and so is of great interest for its plant and insect life. Ploughing and spraying with herbicides destroy the wild flowers which would otherwise thrive.

Plants found there include Pyramid and Bee Orchids, Horseshoe Vetch, Sainfoin, Mignonette, Yellow Rattle, Field Scabious, Salad Burnet, Wild Basil, Marjoram, Common Rockrose, Common Milkwort, Purging Flax, Burnet Saxifrage, Common Gromwell, Hop Trefoil, Ploughman's Spikenard etc etc:

The meadow has not been managed for many years. As a result, vigorous plants dominate and invasive scrub would eventually kill off much of the rich limestone flora if unchecked: For example, Yellow Rattle was very common but is not now much in evidence. The plan is based on clearing scrub and regular grazing by sheep outside flowering and seeding periods to clear the way for each season's new growth of flowers. Most of the work must be done by volunteers to allow full funding of the scheme.

The Parish Council has asked me to coordinate work and I am recruiting interested people so we can start immediately once the site is bought,

I have long been interested in this meadow and have watched its deterioration, though cheered by the resilience of many of the most interesting plants. In the past, the small size and the absence of really rare plants made it difficult for the WWT to give priority. However, they advised that grants from the Rural Action Scheme can enable local councils to set up and run nature reserves at little cost to themselves. Winsley Parish Council showed immediate interest and asked WWT to survey and report, which they did favourably, offering valuable advice on management and funding. The Council decided to go ahead and are currently buying the site at modest cost from the Health Authority,

Help will first be needed from the Trust and other experts, including providers of sheep. Then, volunteers will erect fencing and stiles and water must be laid on so grazing can begin. Public access, including paths and seating may be needed, though a footpath and road on upper and lower sides already facilitate access. The reserve must be publicised.

There's a good chance that *Murhill Bank* can continue to be a valuable and interesting botanical site, and give hope for sites elsewhere in the County:

**John Presland**

## Mousetails in Woodborough

In 1947 Donald Grose recorded *Myosurus minimus* (Mousetail) as a rare plant. One of its sites was at Woodborough in North Wiltshire. The Marlborough College Botanical Society had previously recorded it there in 1866 and post-1935. During the Flora Mapping years a single specimen was found at Ware's Nursery in Woodborough. It is currently regarded as a nationally scarce plant, *M. minimus* germinates in the Autumn and has been badly affected by modern farming.

During Spring 1995 a single specimen was found in a field half a mile from Ware's Nursery: In 1996, the field was planted with maize, and harvested in the autumn. The field was then neither ploughed nor planted till August 1997. During the fallow period the space between the rows of dry grey stalks was colonised by arable weeds such as *Poa annua* (Annual Meadow Grass), *Chenopodium album* (Fat Hen), *Juncus bufonius* (Toad Rush) and the occasional Scentless Mayweed (*Tripleurospermum inodorum*), with *C. album* tending to hide the lower growing plants.

Late in May this year I counted 97 plants of *M. minimus* growing in some of the few bare patches of earth and have no doubt there were more under the overgrowth of plants: A plant was photographed but a week later, walking through the field, it was impossible to find any Mousetail plants among the stronger-growing weeds:

Rita Grose



*Myosurus minimus*  
Mousetail

# Botanical Monstrosities:

## A first step in Plant Teratology

by Martin Cragg-Barber \*

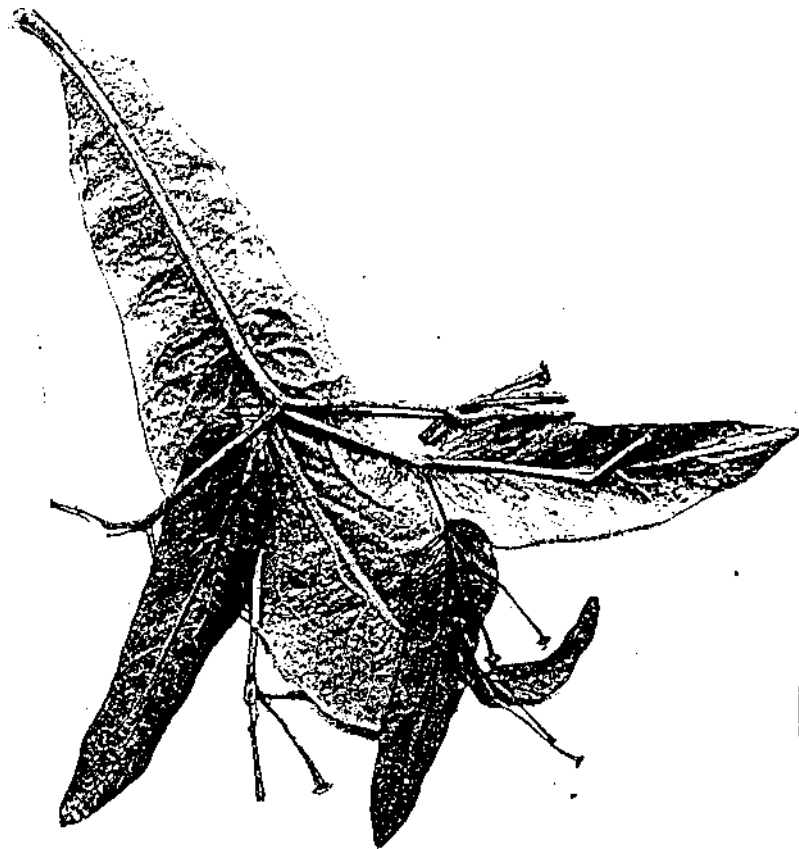
A View by Jack Oliver

Plant aberrations are of intrinsic interest. They represent a range of different scientific phenomena. Some of those variations with a genetic basis could persist and become susceptible to natural selection -- the experimental sports of Nature which provide the opportunities for evolution. The depredations by obsessive Victorian collectors on whole populations of rare fern variants seem by today's standards to have been selfishly destructive, but these Victorians at least were alert to botanical variability.

The topic is vast: Aberrations may be caused by abnormal growing conditions, including different nutritional levels, by viruses, bacteria and fungi; by galls, in turn due to a variety of agents including mites and insects: by physical factors, by somatic mutations causing chimaeras, seldom transmitted to the next generation, by gene or chromosome mutations in reproductive tissues which may then be heritable and by combinations of the preceding as with mutagens and by other and unknown factors.

There would seem to be two main types of interest. The booklet, as its title implies, inclines more to the horticulturalist and gardener than to the scientific botanist, but spiralling, fasciation, proliferation, peloria, variegation in leaves or petals should capture the attention of the botanist, too: I had previously wondered how pitcher plants could have evolved, but on *page 15* there is a drawing of a pitcher leaf on a *Pelargonium* and on the back cover, a photo of a *Primrose* Pitcher leaf! *pp 30-31* give a clear and simple outline of the system of genes which switch on other genes to give sepals, petals, stamens and carpels, alone or in sequence together, to explain many floral aberrations. *Page 23* shows the transition from palmate or digitate to pinnate leaf dissection in a Horse Chestnut tree. On *p. 25* a potato plant is drawn with above-ground leaf aril tubers. The increasing interest in wild Bluebell variability (Britain is the centre of world population of this species) is considered on *p. 25*.

The development of frost resistance, insect repellent poisons or sticky hairs, perennating ability or the capacity of some populations within certain species to develop resistance to pollutants such as zinc, copper, lead and sulphur dioxide (Red Champion, Bent-grass, London Plane etc) may all be more important in botanical survival terms than multiple petals or other



*Multibracteolate  
Lime tree inflorescence*

"monstrosities".

A human in the middle ages with intellectual cunning, resistance to plague, TB or dysentery - or healthy fertility - would have been armed with better biological adaptation than one with big ears or funny hair. Many of the blatant biological monstrosities may likewise have less biological importance than more important but less obvious metabolic adaptations in plants.

However, I think this booklet achieves a happy balance between historical, horticultural and scientific botanical interests. The author's future aim is to collect "as much detail as possible on the grosser aberrations observable in the wild over the next 2 or 3 years :." I would wish that this aim could also include significant but not necessarily 'gross' changes observed - say a Groundsel plant perennating and seeding for three years rather than one:

The content, format, pictures and fine colour photographs in this booklet constitute an agreeable read and a helpful first step in the study of Plant Teratology.

Jack Oliver

\* Copies available from the author at:  
*I Station Cottages, Hullavington, SN14 6ET*

# Longest Nettle Contest (Dorset)

from *The **Bridport (Dorset) News***:

..... (Alex Williams) arrived with a nettle that was 15ft 6in long and said that if anyone beat him, he would eat it. Amazingly, someone turned up with a 16ft nettle, so Alex carried out his promise. Now, every year, if his nettle is not the longest, he eats the winner...." \* .

I am just over 6ft. Nettles often sting my forehead. Most floras give the height ranges as 2-4ft or 1-5 ft. Stace gives the maximum at 5ft, but CTM allowed an exceptional maximum of 8ft 4in. Whenever I comment on 7-9ft nettles, fellow botanists say "....it's the reduced light" ( woodland) or " competitive growth" ( ditches) or "ideal growing conditions" ( riversides) or "over-enrichment with nitrates" (farmland).

Autumn 1997 might be a good season for long nettles. So far, my confirmed Wiltshire record is a mere lift 4in\*\* : It seems that Alex Williams and his Dorset drinking companions have shown more resolution than amateur and professional botanists elsewhere in Europe. It would be good to have reliable records of extreme nettle heights, and those of other herbaceous native plants, such as Bracken or Rosebay Willow Herb, as we have for trees.

After all, we in the Botanical Society are not committed to eating winning specimens !

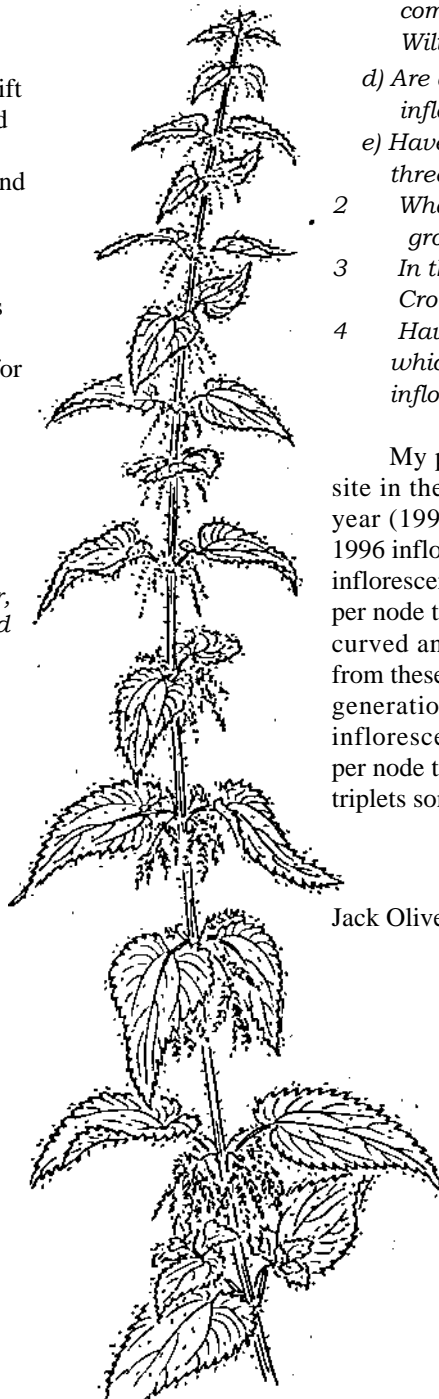
Jack Oliver

\*\* NEW RECORD :near Bodenham, south of Salisbury, in mid-November, 1 retrieved Nettles from a damp field edge (NOT this time from the banks of the R. Avon)

amongst very dense Brambles and English Elm suckers: Their heights were: 3.11m, 3.16m, 3:18m and one of 3.58m (ie: just under 12 feet): Lateral (side) branches to 1.63m ( over 5ft) Mid stem circumference 3.5cm-5cm (2').

And one that got away.....

I also saw one Nettle about 4m in height but it was in thick brambles and too difficult to reach, unfortunately:



## Brachypodium pinnatum

(Somerford Common)

..... **answers, please !**

It's time to let Dr Tom Cope of Kew know of our findings. Would all WBS members growing the second generation seeds from the multi- spikelet-per-node Somerford Common plants please let me know the following:

- 1 a) Are the initial inflorescences normal, multi-spikeleted per node, or mixed, or even semi-paniculate ?
- b) Have subsequent inflorescences become more complex, if the initial ones were simple (normal) spikes?
- c) Have the plants formed (large) clumps, or are they like the ordinary Tor grass so commonly found in open areas around Wiltshire ?
- d) Are any plants (ground level to top of inflorescence) longer than 120cm ?
- e) Have any spikelets or groups of two or three spikelets, formed on small stalks ?
- 2 What is the soil on which they have been grown
- 3 In the open, or shade, or semi-shaded ? Crowded by other plants or not ?
- 4 Have you kept seed (please do) from plants which form multi-spikeleted or semipaniculate inflorescences ?

My plants were grown on chalk on a bonfire site in the open: They flowered in July in the first year (1996) from rather dense tussocks: The July 1996 inflorescences were mostly normal. New inflorescences appeared in August, some bi-spikeleted per node towards the base. The spikelets were large, curved and with fertile seed (3rd generation started from these in 1997). However, these same second generation plants have produced more and denser inflorescences in July 1997, with many tri-spikeleted per node towards the inflorescence bases, and the triplets sometimes with a tiny stalk.

Jack Oliver

# Get the Picture?

*(or, Practice makes Perfect)*

November 1st

First Winter Meeting of the Season

The first of the indoor 1997/98 winter meetings held at Marlborough College featured an interesting talk by Michael Ponting (ably assisted by Maureen), entitled "Accessible Botanical Photography".

Michael explained how the introduction of the Single Lens Reflex (SLR) camera revolutionised the taking of botanical photographs -especially closeups- because one now saw in the view-finder, in focus, exactly what the finished picture would include. Various means of achieving good close-ups were discussed, such as extension tubes and the use of separate dioptres attached to the front of the lens. These, which could vary in magnification from +1 to +4, were an excellent and cheap way of getting close, although 'stopping down' to about f8 was desirable to get the best optical results: While focussing to within 25cm or less was possible with the new generation of popular lenses, best results at extreme close range

would usually still be obtained with a true (and expensive) macro lens, computed for close work:

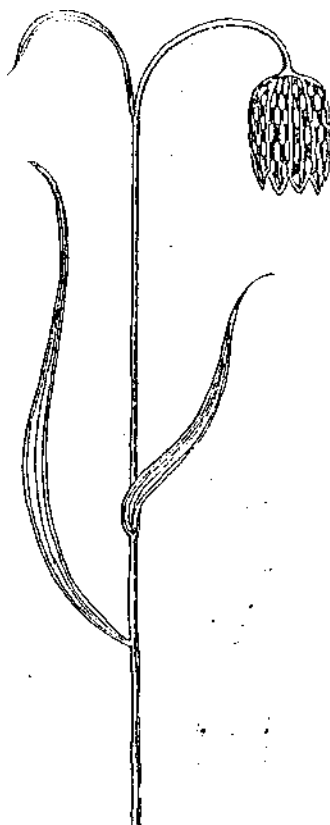
Limitations of the popular compact cameras were explained, and the various ingenious ways of keeping your subject still in adverse conditions proved of valuable help. Michael then demonstrated, with the help of Maureen, the best way of carrying your equipment so it was always ready for quick use.

The afternoon concluded with an exchange of ideas over a welcome cuppa.

Chas and **Joan Woodgate**

## *Talking photography*

Dick Last tells us that Panasonic lithium (and other) batteries for cameras are available at a much reduced price from: *SM Trades, 23 Fellside, Spondon Derby DE21 7EW Tel: (01332) 672400*



## WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

### Committee

<b>Dave Green</b>	Chairman	(01225)835227
<b>Jean Wall</b>	Secretary	(01666)823865
<b>Gwyneth Yerrington</b>	Treasurer	(01225)862740
<b>Joy Newton</b>	Meetings Secretary	(01672)540356
<b>Malcolm Hardstaff</b>	Plant Records	(01672)512029
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