

# Newsletter

Issue 15 January 2000

## WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

### Winter/Spring Meetings 2000

Sat 19 February 2.00pm

**Steve Whitworth**

*Talk and Slide Show*

**Botany, Butterflies and Dragonflies**

*Tea and discussion afterwards*

*Marlborough College*

*Science laboratories*

Saturday 4th March 2.00pm

### Annual General Meeting

**St Andrews Church Hall, Devizes**

*After the AGM there will be a slide show  
'Memories of the Gower' by various  
participants, followed by refreshments.*

### *Contents include:*

- ❖ Last summer in the Gower
- ❖ ..., and Glorious Devon in 2000
- ❖ Committee volunteers, anyone?
- ❖ Last year's field trips
- ❖ 'New editor for *Newsletter*
- ❖ (*Packed*) Summer Programme (encl.)



## UPdate

### BRAUNTON BURROWS FIELD TRIP

Bookings for the Field Trip to Branton Burrows, Barnstaple on :tune 9th - 11th have exceeded expectations 27 places have been taken up already and all local B&Bs are now full,

*However, if you would still like to go  
& can arrange your own accommodation  
contact: Joy Newton (01672) 5123611*

For a flavour of last year's highly successful trip to the Gower, see **Louisa Kilgallen's** lively account on p.5 ...

# EAST OF MELKSHAM

15th May

Leader: **Paul Darby**

Fourteen members, led by **Paul Darby**, walked down to Chittoe Mill (now restored), The gravel track is lined with Pendulous Sedge and Water Horsetail. A newly-dug pond nearby promises good wildlife in the future, Moving westwards onto a wet meadow (extensively disturbed by heavy machinery) we found a good range of plants, including Water Avens and its hybrid (x. *Geum urbanum*), Meadowsweet, Cuckoo Flower, Ragged Robin, Yellow Pimpernel, Twayblade, Tormential, Sharp-flowered Rush and a few spotted orchids in leaf.

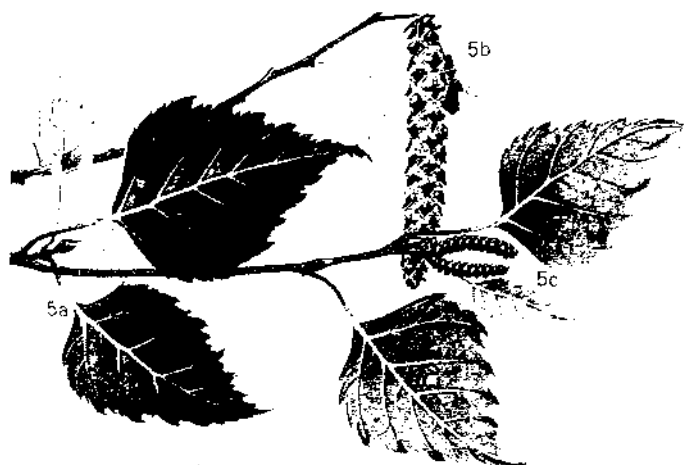
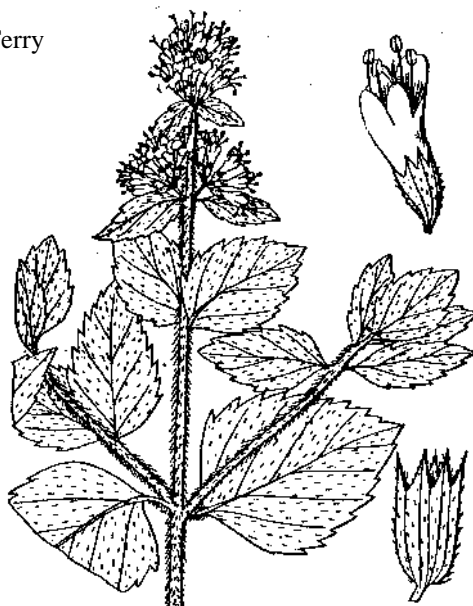
The meadow is bounded on three sides by Prickmoor Wood (leased to the Forestry Commission by the Spye Park Estate), where many gurgling streams spring from Coral Rag where it meets the Oxford Clay,

Calcium-rich water coats twigs and stones with tufa. Tall stands of *MO plicata* near the track give way to steep ash woodland carpeted with Wild Garlic. The track edges revealed Wood Speedwell, Dog's Mercury Purple Loosestrife, Hemp Agrimony, Water Mint, Wood Spurge; also Great Fescue, Hairy Wood-rush and many ferns, Broad cushions of the distinctive moss *Rhizomnium punctatum* grow, with many 'liverworts, just above water level. An Eyed I adybird (*Anatis ocellata*) joined us briefly,

During lunch break, Paul unerringly re-discovered a small area of *Colchicum autumnale* and Herb Paris among the ash and hazel. The woodland here is criss-crossed with swamps but we found a safe route up through mased blooms of Ransomes to the high ground, eventually regaining the track by slippery but very beautiful paths among the streams.

Paul was able to add to the local lists of species for both meadow and woodland.

Philip Terry



## 7 Fields Conservation Area

Perhill, Swindon

9 May and 27 June

The Seven Fields Nature Reserve of c150 acres within the urban area of North Swindon had not been comprehensively surveyed but was said to have 300 or so vascular plant species,

To help the *Seven Fields Conservation Group*, our Society organised Spring and Summer meetings to prepare species lists for the 7-Fields and Swindon Millennium reports and planned publications. Our work was also intended to provide a baseline for the future with some quantitative assessments: for instance, occasional, unusual or showy species were well recorded, but there were few or no records of some abundant grass species, sedges, rushes or common shrubs or trees.

Five Society members attended the Spring half-day meeting, Five more, not all the same, added extra records and frequency ratings to Marilyn Beale's fine colourcoded checklist at the fulliday Summer meeting. On June 27, the day of the Summer Survey, four members of the 7-Fields Group helped, one providing a large tent from which to work: This was invaluable because of the intermittent rain.

We worked on 4 different meadow areas, including some adjacent wooded boundaries, attaining about 230 species. These meadows have 6 orchid species, none common. Phillip Terry noted one Bee Orchid on the 27th, among Pyramidal and Common Spotted Orchids, There were other indications of species-richness in these old meadows - for instance, Pepper Saxifrage was found in 3 well separated meadows, I think that our members and the 7-Fields Group were all very happy with this pre-Millennial work.

Jack Oliver

## FLOWERS OF THE BURREN

23 January

Maureen Ponting

Maureen's wonderful slides of the Burren brough back happy memories for those of us who had been there. Maureen told us of the climatic and glacial changes which created the amazing pattern of flora, Southern and Northern plants exist side by side and alpiners within yards of the sea shore,

Micro climates and different soil conditions in the cracks (grykes) of the limestone slabs mean that Sanicle and Marsh Marigold appear close by, with lime- and acid-loving plants within yards of each other. We saw slides of the delicate Spring Sandwort, Sea Lavender and great drifts of Thrift, Blue Moor Grass, Stiff Sand Grass, the much sought-after Dense-Flowered Orchid, *Neotinea maculata* (also known as the Burren or Irish Orchid), Golden Rod, and the rare and beautiful *Pinguicula grandiflora* (Large-flowered Butterwort),

In Mullaghmoor, where the ill-fated Visitor Centre is returning to the wild, there are *turloughs* (lakes that disappear in Summer) with Heath Dog Violet (*Viola canina*) and the Red Data Book Fen Violet (*Viola persicifolia*) which is submerged for part of the year.

A scramble up Black Head, to an old Stone Age ring fort where the two saxifrages grow together: *rosacea* (Irish) and *hypnoides* (Mossy), Also Bearberry, *Dryas octopetala* (Mountain Avens) and a wonderful field ablaze with Ragged Robin and Meadow Thistle, Many orchids - Fly, Western Marsh, Pyramidal were just a few,

Then the picturesque roadside well where Fairy Foxglove (*DMus alpinus*) thrives on the roof. Our tour came to an end and it was back to the gloom of Marlborough in January !

Marjorie Waters

## Rebranched Equisetum

Rebranched Equiseta tend to key out in the old and new Flora as *E. sylvaticum* (Wood Horsetail), This is very rare in South Wilts (VC 008) and has never been confirmed in North Wilts (VC 007), However, rebranched *Equiseta* are quite common in our county, Usually, the rebranching is infrequent, irregular and erratic, such Horsetail populations generally being designated as *E. arvense*, the very common Field Horsetail: Occasionally, the plants are bigger, with many long branches, a proportion of which have somewhat irregular but frequent secondary branches of variable length:

## Ashdown House

21st June 1999

Leader: Malcolm Storey

It was a bright sunny day with scudding clouds, though a little chilly, Five of us, including our leader gathered on the car park of Ashbourne House, a National Trust property in Oxfordshire.

Some thought the house looked like a miniature French chateau; it certainly looked strange in the English countryside, Sarsen stones were lying all around, some in the long grass looking like a resting pride of lions,

We had a task to record for Atlas 2000 on a section of downland and woodland belonging to the National Trust, Around us were many lime trees and their varying hybridity was discussed at length.

We climbed Weathercock Hill which didn't see very productive, but we clocked up the species, We moved on to a well-sprayed wheat field, but the arable weeds hadn't been daunted; we found a good mix in the under-flora, including Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) and Venus's Looking Glass (*Legousia hybrida*). We returned down the hill on a different route and found a few jewels of chalkland flora, Thyme (both *drucei* and *pulegioides*), Chalk Milkwort, Squinancywort, Horseshoe Vetch, Rockrose, Pyramidal Orchids and in one small area 50+ Early Gentians (*Gentianella anglica*). They had flushed flowering and were in seed. Sadly, the whole slope was infested with Tor Grass,

Jack Oliver went home at lunchtime, missing the chance to appreciate the abundant woodland nettles, **Philip Terry** dived in and out of them with alacrity, looking for Herb Paris which was featured on the National Trust display board, He was unlucky, but before we left his sharp eyes spotted the Nettle-leaved Bellflower among its common stinging neighbours,

In all, we found about 159 different species. We enjoyed our day and gave our thanks to Malcolm,

Eileen Rollo

---

Chris Page, the BSBI referee and author on Equiseta thinks that the Elborough Bridge (SU124 871) population could be the so far undescribed hybrid between *E. arvense* and *E. telmateia* (the Great Horsetail), However, it could just be an extreme form of the supposed parents,

We are asked to provide more dated specimens throughout the year, in particular to look for any cone shoots in the first two weeks of April,

Jack Oliver

# An Autumn walk in Great Ridge Wood

Sunday Oct 10th

Ten members met on an overcast but mainly dry day to enjoy a walk in this ancient woodland where Francis Rose has recorded lichens.

A magnificent team effort ensured a good day. **Barbara** and Dick Last had previously introduced me to the wood, Jack Oliver supplied information and voucher specimens and Joan Davies helped us record, using her digital camera and Global Positioning System.

The relatively long walk to and from the wood was punctuated by several interesting finds, particularly of fungi. These included the birch Polypore *Piptoporus betulinus*, two species of puffball, most probably *Lycoperdon perlatum* and *L. pyriforme*; a species of *Lepiota*, Candle-Snuff Fungus, *Xylaria hypoxylon*, a larch bolete *Suillus grevillei*. Wood Woolly-foot, *Collybia peronata*, *Mycena pura*, the Beefsteak Fungus, *Fistulina hepatica*, the Orange Peel fungus *Akurla aurantia*, and, to the amazement of all, many specimens of an Earthstar which we believe to be *Geastrum sessile*. When walking with Barbara and Dick some six weeks ago, we found a different species of Earthstar *Geastrum triplex* in the same place. Since none of those present professed to be expert mycologists, it is quite possible that some misidentification has occurred,

The main purpose of our walk was to record some of the large trees which grow in the wood. A large quantity of rhododendrons has been cleared from around some of the best and it was in this area that we concentrated our efforts. We managed to record twelve specimens including *Salix caprea*, *Benda pubescens* and *B. pendula*. *Fraxinus excelsior*, *Fagus sylvatica*, *Corylus avellana* and *Quercus spp.* Our choice reflected the range of species as well as illustrating the size of the specimens. Of the six oaks that were documented, two were deemed to be pure *Q. robur*, three *Q. rosacea* (the hybrid) but with an inclination to the *Q. robur* parent and one, also *Q. rosacea* but with an inclination to the *Q. petraea* parent. Determination depended on the petiole and peduncle lengths and the presence or absence of stellate hairs on the under surface of the leaves. Fortunately, Jack had obtained advice and help from Allen Coombes, the BSBI referee on Oaks, and without this guidance, I think we would have been quite perplexed by some of the combinations of characteristics which we found,

# Middleton Down

July 7th

Leader: **Barbara Last**

This meeting was held jointly with the Hampshire Wildlife Trust Flora Group and the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society under the able leadership of **Barbara Last**, the voluntary Warden of the Reserve, to see the summer flowers on this species-rich chalk downland. Grasses were growing in profusion after the wet spring and the 19 botanists were grateful to Dick Last for cutting the tall nettles growing in the gateways.

We were told that the Reserve was grazed in the winter by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust flock of 75 mule crossbred sheep which were looked after by the local farmer and taken off in April.

We were pleased to find Frog Orchids (*Coeloglossum viride*), Clustered Bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*) and the nationally rare Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*), together with chalk-loving plants such as Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and Squinancywort (*Asperula cyanchica*). There were some fine Woolly Thistles (*Cirsium eriophorum*) and Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) in profusion. Some people saw a bare and there was a number of Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Ringlet and Red Admiral butterflies and several Plume Moths. Although the reserve was dotted with thyme-covered anthills, -blue butterflies were not in evidence.

Phillida Sneyd

---

The data will be passed on to the Biological Records Division of the Trust and to the English Nature Veteran Tree Initiative as well as to the Charity which is initiating a Tree Register of British Isles (TROBI).

We are grateful to the Fonthill **Bishop** Estate from whom permission to record and to complete a circular route, part of which was not on a public right of way, was obtained. Thank you all who contributed to a very pleasant day.

**Pat Woodruffe**

## CLEEVES WOOD

17th Jnne

Leader: **Ron Hurst**

About 14 of us followed Ron down the path from Hinton Charterhouse to Cleaves Wood, It soon became clear that Ron had known the wood for many years,

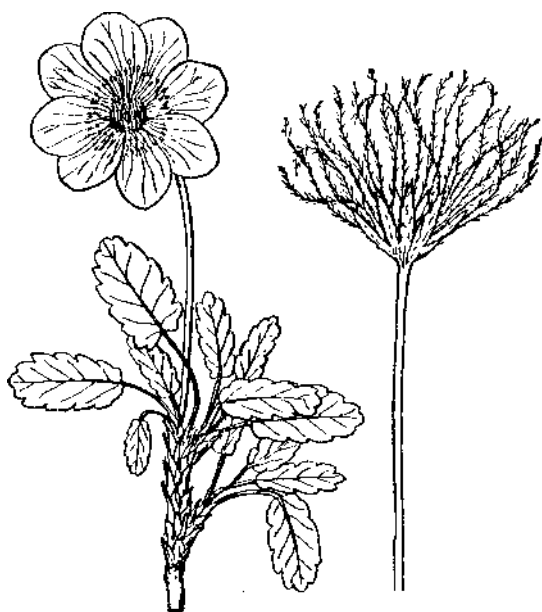
We found batches of small Tortoiseshell caterpillars on the nettles, and, coming to the entrance of the wood, found that the site for Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogallum Umbellatum*) had suffered from the attentions of a bulldozer and not one could be found. In the wood itself we were surprised at the numbers of chalk downland flowers, so tall as to be almost unrecognisable from their usual downland appearance, Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*), Marjoram, Rock Rose, Salad Burnet, Fairy Flax and EyeBright, bordering the path in a tangle, Nettle-leaved Bellflower, more at home, promised a good show later in the year, We found the hybrid Campion (*Silene hampeana*), Common Spotted Orchid and - a nice surprise, a clump or two of Bird's Nest Orchid hidden in the trees.

We stopped for lunch in a beautiful glade where it was difficult to find anywhere to sit down without being a vandal, Around us were dotted Bee and Fly Orchids with Gentians to come. A Crab spider on a Rockrose, a plume moth and beautiful Demoiselle Fly added to the enjoyment,

We walked down the track, passing Stinking Iris to the Wellow Road where many plants of Bath Asparagus (*Ornithogallum pyrenaicum*) were growing by the road,

We made our way back through the woods, Ron's knowledge of the plants and the wood made the day a special delight and one that stands out in the year for me

Moyra Robertson



## Rushall Farm Upavon

24 June

Leader: Nigel Wookey

A mild evening with dark clouds and noises off..... hard to distinguish between thunder and artillery.. Nine of us met Nigel Wookey who showed us his organic farm and explained the cropping system —a four year rotation:

autumn-sown milling wheat, spring-sown cereal (barley or oats), undersown with a grass and clover mix for a two year ley..., a traditional system which encourages the reintroduction of wild plants.

He invited us to walk into the crop which we were first reluctant to do, but soon found the crop so sparse we could walk between plants doing minimal damage. We saw *Vicia sativa* ssp. *sativa* (Common Vetch), *Chaerophyllum temulum* (Wild or Rough Chervil), *Arrhenatherum elatium* var. *bulbosus* (Onion Couch), a weed problem, *Legousia hybrida* (Venus's Looking Glass), *Orobanche* 48cm (19in) high and presumably growing on the adjacent *Centaurea nigra* (Common Knapweed); but how many of us have excavated the roots to check on the assertions in literature as to host plants ?

We also saw *Chicorium intybus* (Chicory), *Papaver rhoeas* (Common Poppy), *Lithospermum arvense* (Field Gromwell), *Lamium amplexicaule* and *Prunus cerasus* in a hedge.

Christopher J Perraton

*Ed Note: Nigel Wookey is a pioneer of organic farming. His farm was the first in Britain to convert (1970). He now farms 1650 acres at Rushall and a further 500 at Upavon.*

## Somerford Common

13th July

Leader: **John Grearson**

For the 5th year running we visited Somerford Common .... seven of us this year and rather later than usual. By varying the time of year we always find some new species.

John Grearson showed us the rare *Centaureum pulchellum* (Lesser Centaury) which was just flowering -- very tiny and only growing in the grassy track, We identified *Epilobium obscurum* (Short-fruited Willowherb) and *Epilobium ciliatum* (American Willowherb) neither of which we had recorded in previous years.

We saw many Marbled White butterflies, a Silver-washed Fritillary and Large and Small Skippers, making it a very enjoyable morning.

We plan to meet at Somerford in May next year, to record the early species.

Joy Newton

## Weekend at the Gower \*\*

Leader: **Dave Green**

11-13 July 99

It was a sublime Summer's evening as the party of 22 assembled at the B & B, an impressive former hunting lodge deep within the ancient woodland at *Parc le Breos*.

Those who arrived early on Friday were able to indulge in some preparatory cramming during an evening stroll from West Cliff to Threecliff bay. For the rest of the evening, it was difficult to know who were enjoying themselves more, those on their second bottle of wine or those dissecting their various finds from the walk,

Saturday morning at Oxwich Burrows started well with dune slacks stacked full of orchids, including Early Marsh, Southern Marsh, Lesser Twayblade and Bee Orchid. Non-orchid species included: Round-leaved Wintergreen, Variegated Horsetail and Dune Fescue, all of which are nationally scarce,

After the labours of walking through the sand dunes, Dave assured us that the cliff walk at Port Eynon would be easy going. Magnificent views across the Gower coast contrasted with the miniature beauty of the turf we were perched on, full of Spring Squill, Flea Sedge, Sand Cat's Tail and Squinancywort. From there, things went rapidly downhill as we plummeted precariously down the cliff face in the search for Rock Samphire and Rock Sea-lavender. We met with success on both fronts but didn't manage to key sea lavender out beyond aggregate level -- clearly the demands of the weekend were taking their toll.

After supper, **Pat Woodruffe** put the day's exploits into perspective with slides of her adventures in South America, Lepidopterist **Steve Whitworth** hoped to catch us out with slides of butterflies from around the world and **Barbara** Last reminded us of our own riches in Wiltshire,

Sunday morning, and a visit to acidic pools and grassland at the top of Reynoldson quickly sorted out the Wiltshire Lifers from the more cosmopolitan botanists. The bleak hilltop held many plants which occur only rarely in Wiltshire, including Ivy-leaved Bellflower, Green-ribbed Sedge, Bog Pondweed, Bristle Bent and Pill Sedge. Our last venue for the weekend took us to the north coast - a quick scout round saltmarsh at Llanridian and an amble through the fresh-water marsh behind, Dave took particular delight in demonstrating the schwingmoor (floating pond bog) feature. Surely the first time that any of us had seen him literally quaking in his boots.

Overall, the trip had something for everyone, was well organised and a great laugh

Louisa Kilgallen

## Fungus Foray

Savernake Forest, 26 Sept 1999

22 of us, plus **Peter Marren** and **Malcolm Storey**, set out to search the grassy area near the Column - after a fascinating and informative introduction by Peter,

Hard to find at first, then an ever-increasing abundance of splendid fungi appeared as if by *magic*. The damp grey morning turned to drizzle and then came a downpour. So absorbed were we, we hardly noticed the wet as we explored dense deciduous woodland north of the gravel roadway,

Moving south of the roadway we searched among huge pollard beeches as the sun suddenly lit up the forest with early autumn gold. We had seen the green variety of the Charcoal Burner, Lemon-Yellow False Death Caps, the extremely dainty Horsehair Fungus; Smelly, Common and Dog Stinkhorns, Amethyst Deceivers, many Russulas, widely scattered and brittle; Wood Woolly-foot, Jelly-babies, the edible Aniseed Toadstool, the yolk-yellow Chanterelle, pretty "Plums and Custard" the large bitter Bolete and peppery Milk Caps.

Now the Cortinarius species began to appear: a family so extensive and hard to identify, we had to overlook them (or become rooted to the spot!). A boy demanded that black truffles should be found - claiming to have a nose for them, but instead we discovered the chunky Blackening Russula, edible Tawny Grisette, minute formations of Slime-Mould on a tree trunk, edible honey-coloured Oyster Mushrooms on a great fallen bough, Earth Balls, Puff Balls, a contorted False Morel and the incredible Earth Star, (*Geastrum triplex*).

Along the road edge near the parked cars, late surprises were The Miller, with its appetising smell of flour and *Lepiota fresh*, an uncommon little parasol mushroom. An enjoyable, rewarding and memorable 'foray'.

Philip Terry

\* \*

*We are following up this highly successful pioneering weekend with a trip to **Braunton Sands**, Barnstaple, this Summer, See separate article, Ed,*



## BRYOPHYTES

November 20

Leader: **Rod Stern**

There were twelve members who accompanied **Rod Stern** on the morning ascent of Pewsey Hill. More than 41 Bryophyte species were found, including two new to the 10km square. These were the mosses *Fissidens adiantoides* and *Pottia davalliana (starkeana)* on base calcareous soil,

On the track up, we were distinguishing *Fern prothalli* from Liverworts. We (Roger Veall?) also wound the tiny chalk downland liverwort, *Leiocolea turbinata*, the whole plant about 3mm long, with tiny bilobed leaves,

in the afternoon, Rod Stern helped us with microscopic examination of the specimens at Marlborough College science laboratories,

Jack Oliver

*Jean Wall checks the record-breaking (15ft 10in) potential of Jack Oliver's Savernake*

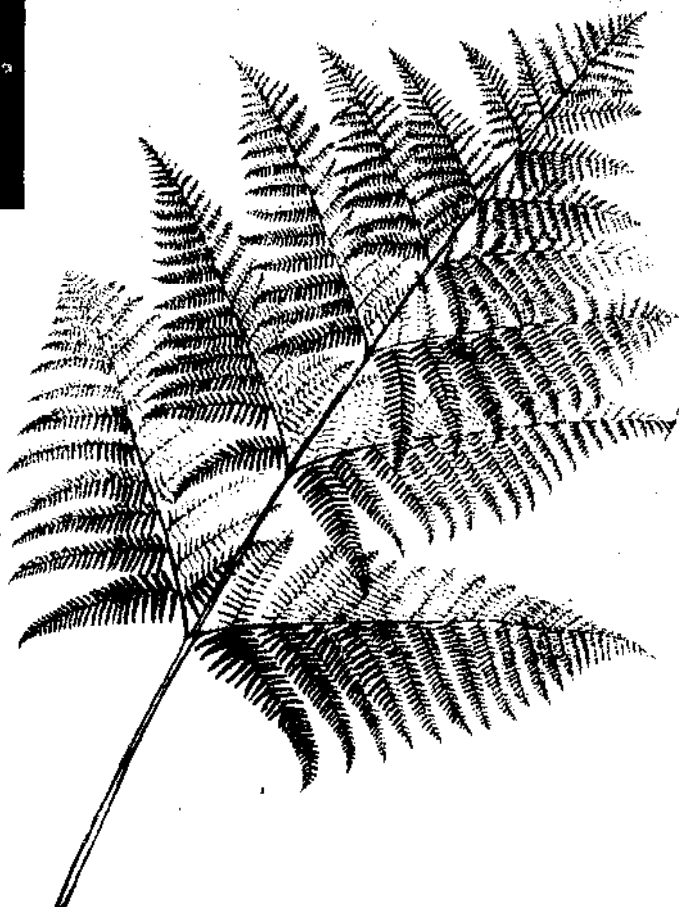
## Record Bracken Find (Guinness-worthy?)

The bracken canopy NW of Holt Pound in the east of Savernake Forest was in parts 2m (6ft 8in) high last autumn. Near the giant King of Limbs Oak, there are some young Douglas Firs; through these, and using their support, there were even longer Bracken fronds growing,

Some of these were measured at the Wiltshire Biological Records Centre by **Jean Wall**, the longest being 4.65m (15ft 10in).

The *Guinness Book of Records* has been contacted and an assessment is pending.

Jack Oliver



# Secretary's Notes

## \*\*Accidents and Injuries

Please note and convey to any guests you bring to our field meetings::

"Any accident or injury at Wiltshire Botanical Society meetings is not the responsibility of the Society"

**\*\*We have reciprocal arrangements** with the Flora group of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and the Botanical Section of the Newbury and District Field Club, Consequently we are welcome at eachothers' meetings,

If you would like a llist of the meetings of either of these societies, contact Jack Oliver on ( 01672) 861251,

**\*\* We welcome new Committee members,** If you would like to be proposed (or would like to propose someone) for the Committee at the AGM on March 4th, please contact Joy Newton: ( 01672) 540356,

**\*\* AND items for the Newsletter...** on any newsworthy and botany-related subject, particularly if Wiltshire or the South of England are involved, Preferably\_ under 250 words,

The next issue will be published this Summer by the incoming editor, Richard Aisbitt 84 Goddard Avenue, Swindon SN4 4HT (01793 694680) See separate Editor's note,

Editor/ **Michael** Ponting Technical Editor/

NEW EDITOR [ w.e.f, 1 February 20

**Richard Aisbitt**

84 Goddard Avenue, Swindon SN1 4

Editor's Note@yahoo.co.uk

With technology's continuing march, your new Newsletter editor, **Richard Aisbitt** will be much better equipped and a lot easier to contact, He has a further important qualification ..., ...he's actually a botanist !

Richard is fully computerised and (for those contributors to whom this means something), will assemble your Newsletter on MSWord® and happy to receive items via E-mail or floppy disk,

From all the rest of our contributors, he will be equally happy with articles that have been penned or typed - and illustrated -as nature once intended,

So, from now on, please send all material to Richard, or contact him at either address shown below, And grateful thanks to all contributors for your kindly support ever almost four years,

## WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL Committee

Jean Wall		
Barbara Last	Chairman	01722 790368
Jean Wall	Secretary	01666 823865
Gwyneth Yerrington	Treasurer	01225 862740
Malcolm Hardstaff	Plant Records	01672 512029
Paul Darby	Wilts Wildlife Trust	01380 725670
Sally Scott-White	Wilts Biological Record.	01380 725670
Phil Wilson	Science Sub-Committee	01725 510748
Louisa Kilgallen	Minutes Secretary	01225 867331
John Presland	Editor/Wiltshire Botany	01225 865125
Dave Green		01225 835227
John Harry		01793 534539
Jack Oliver		01672 861251
Christopher Perraton		01225 703294
Maureen Ponting		01672 512361
Pat Woodruffe		01794 884436

## Subscription Reminder

Members are reminded that subscriptions for 2000 are now due and should be sent to the Treasurer,

**Mrs GC Yerrington,**  
28 Meadowfield Rd,  
Bradford on Avon  
BA15 1PL

