

## NEWSLETTER

Issue 17    February 2001

# WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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# Visit to Highgrove

1st September 2000



Thirty of us descended from the coach and received a cordial welcome from the Highgrove representative. After a short introductory talk we set off in two groups. A grey, drizzly day detracted little from the charm of the dishevelled late 'cottage garden'. Cotton thistles mingled with Giant Hostas and riotous rambling roses, nicely complemented by painted wooden seats - pink under the roses, and turquoise round the hostas. A casually abandoned amphora (brought back from Greece by Prince Charles) lay on its side amid box bushes. Box abounds at Highgrove - clipped hedges and bushes contain and enhance unrestrained stem, leaf and flower.

Emerging from the cottage garden we picked our way carefully along the terrace where *Achemilla*, marjoram, thyme and *Geranium* spilled over the flagstones. A fountain gurgled over a millstone a surrounded by pebbles (collected by Prince Charles). Close to the house stands a huge Cedar of Lebanon - planted in 1794. The cedar frames the thyme walk where cushions of thyme are punctuated by individually shaped golden yew balls, behind which stand two regiments of hornbeams. The vista is completed by a glottal-stopping gladiator, whose name I didn't quite catch.

We were not allowed to walk along the thyme walk and passed on into the black and white area, an experimental garden screened by yew hedges to deter the paparazzi. Within box hedges flowers the almost black: *Salvia discolor* (dark indigo); *Viola Molly Sanderson* (jet black); *Physocarpus diabolus* (dark purple); and white *Primula denticulata alba*; *Aster lady-in-black* (very smart with black foliage and white flowers) and a silver Lupin polar princess.

Up on a ledge below the parapet of the house swallows were still feeding their young in

readiness for the long migration. Beyond the black and white garden is another vista, along an avenue of sixty-seven small leaved lime trees, to the steeple of Tetbury parish church. At the near end of the vista, on a column originally at Victoria Station, and given to Prince Charles by Lord McAlpine, perches a mythical bird. The avenue is so orientated that the sun shines on the bird at noon exactly.

Next we came to the organic area - the vegetable garden, the ethos of Highgrove, and Prince Charles's favourite part of the garden. The success of the vegetable garden is due to a mulch of compost and stable manure which is spread thickly over the soil so that the worms can work it in. No wonder there's such a ravishing abundance of fruit, flowers and vegetables amid the box-lined paths that run under arches of sweet peas and domes of climbing roses, *Clematis*, honeysuckle and jasmine. And not a sign of a slug or snail!

Images of perfect leeks, very purple sprouting broccoli and orange ribbed Swiss chard, faded as we entered the next secret garden, and into the presence of the Goddess of Wood, a thoughtful chin-in-hand muse. She is sculpted in *rosso orbica* - a pink, grey and black marble. So delicate is the sculpting that you can count the vertebrae in the spine.

The last secret garden illustrates a Victorian craze - a strumpery, where tangled roots are interwoven into fantastic contortions and arches, studded with ferns and hellebores. A temple has been created from massive pieces of oak, the pediments filled with twisted wood, like antlers.

Out into the open again we came finally to the wildflower area, which had been mown in July. Our guide explained that initially, in the early 1980s, there had been management problems. It was not until 1997 that things began to improve when the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust was invited to give advice. Now, with the new planting of plugs of species that had disappeared, the meadow is gradually returning to its former glory. Plants such as Betony, Yellow Rattle, Great Burnet and Devil's Bit Scabious are now well established. The meadow is now mown in July, and in the winter it is grazed by sheep.

It has to be said that Highgrove is romantic to the hilt. The WBS was extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to spend three hours in this unique garden. Our last view of it was of hundreds of swallows skimming and swooping low over the insect-rich meadow.

*Rosemary Smith*

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2000

## Savernake Forest Fungus Foray

Joint meeting with Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society

Leaders: Peter Marren and Malcolm Storey

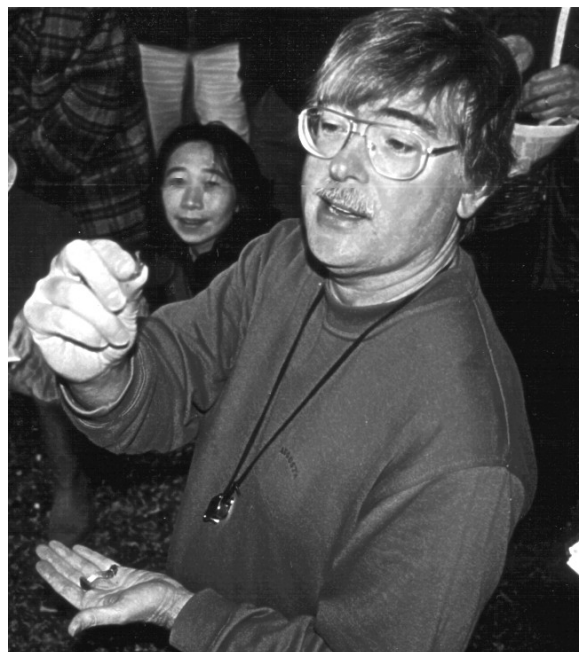
Starting near the Column, twenty-four of us, led by Peter Marren and Malcolm Storey, explored the acid grassland and surrounding woodland (mostly Beech). Peter recalled that this September had a dry first half and very wet second half, causing many species of fungus to appear at once.

Entering the woodland, a ring of *Collybia confluens* feeding on leaf litter was noted. Here were many *Russula* species including *R. mairei*, (The Beechwood Sickener); also *Lactarius blennius* (Slimy Milk Cap) and the curry-scented *L. camphoratus*, also *L. subdulcis*. Above us were the glistening white *Oudemansiella mucida* (Porcelain Fungus) and on the forest floor wide drifts of purple *Laccaria amethystea* (Amethyst Deceiver) some *L. laccata* (The Deceiver), *Lepiota konradii* – large scales on cap, and just a few *Coprinus picaceus* (The Magpie).

Moving on, we came across *Cortinarius* spp, a



*Coprinus picaceus*



*Peter Marren explaining*

large bracket (probably *Ganoderma adspersum*), *Russula ochroleuca* (Common Yellow *Russula*), *Amanita citrina* (False Death Cap) and *Boletus chrysenteron*. Soon *Lepista nuda* (Wood Blewit) with its violet gills, *Amanita rubescens* (The Blusher) and *Tylopilus felleus* (Bitter Bolete) had appeared, along with uncommon *Inocybe* spp: *I. hystrix* and *I. griseolilacina*, these given a Kiss-Test for viscosity!

As trees gave way to grass we saw clumps of Fairy Club: the white *Clavulina cristata* and grey *C. cinerea*, then *Helvella lacunosa* (False Morel) and the deep purple *Russula*, *R. atropurpurea*. Next we saw the edible *Lyophyllum decastes*, also *Lycoperdon pyriforme* – a puffball, and the remarkable *Cantharellus tubaeformis* (brown top, orange stem). Then *Russula xerampelina*, smelling of crab, was found.

Grassland around the Column yielded deep blue *Leetonia surrogate* and golden-yellow Wax caps: *Hygrocybe marchii* and *H. chlorophana*. Meanwhile, Malcolm photographed a very shy Pale Tussock Moth caterpillar.

Driving back along the gravel road we stopped to see the rare *Cortinarius bolaris*, with more *Cantharellus tubaeformis*, also *Helvella*s: *H. crispa* and *H. lacunosa* together, then a dark brown Hare's Ear: *Otidea* sp.

About 53 species were recorded. Thanks to our leaders this was a wonderfully informative and memorable visit.

*Philip Terry.*

## *Ophrys apifera*, Hudson var. *belgarum*. D.M.T. Ettlinger

I first noticed a specimen of this variety of Bee Orchid on Hazelbury Common (ST838677) in 1986. At the time it seemed to be similar to var. *trollii*, the 'Wasp', but not entirely convincing.

Some years later I showed the photograph to David Lang, and he was of the same opinion. A similar plant appeared on Hazelbury Common in 1994, and again the diagnosis was the same.

Then in June 2000 I found a group of ten plants on a by-pass cutting near the village of Ettington, Warwickshire. As the variety seemed to be so constant and widespread I again referred the photographs to David Lang<sup>1</sup>. He, in turn, referred me to a recent (1998) article in *Watsonia* by D.M. Turner Ettlinger<sup>2</sup>.



*Ophrys apifera* - Hazelbury Specimen

I contacted Mr Ettlinger and he confirmed that both Hazelbury and Ettington specimens, though not quite typical, were acceptable as *Ophrys apifera*, var. *belgarum*.

The main diagnostic feature is that the basal shield-like pattern on the normal Bee Orchid lip is



*Ophrys apifera* - Type Specimen

missing, and replaced by a long triangular red-brown area, bordered by distinctive harness-shaped patterns. There is a yellow band across the middle of the lip (labellum). The pointed tip may, or may not, be reflexed.

My thanks are due to David Lang for providing the *Watsonia* reference; to Joy Newton and Jack Oliver for obtaining a copy for me; and especially to Mr D.M.T. Ettlinger for determining the specimens, and giving me permission to use the cover photograph from his book: "*Illustrations of British and Irish Orchids*"<sup>3</sup>.

J.H. TUCKER

November 2000

### References

- <sup>1</sup>"A Guide to the Wild Orchids of Great Britain and Northern Ireland". David Lang, Oxford (1987)
- <sup>2</sup>*Watsonia* 22: 105-107 (1998). "A new variety of *Ophrys apifera* Hudson". D M Turner Ettlinger
- <sup>3</sup>"Illustrations of British and Irish Orchids". D M T Ettlinger (1998)

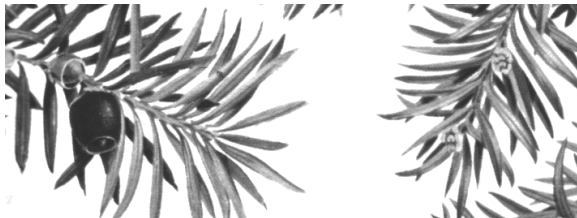


**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2000**

## **Great Yews**

Leader: Barbara Last

14 of us met 5 miles south of Coombe Bissett to walk along a muddy slippery track, which led us after about a miles walk to Great Yews, an ancient forest dating from at least 1600.



We all gasped on arrival at the enormous size of the trees in this great yew forest, which is about a 1/2 sq kilometre in extent. It was dark and gloomy inside. As we entered there was a fallen Yew which was still green at the top, still growing, and in it were growing huge Bracket Fungi pale whitish brown, with frilly edges and odourless.

Under the trees yew berries had dropped and a Robin was singing. We also heard a green Woodpecker shouting in alarm. Under one tree were small twigs of green yew as if some squirrel had them down but we couldn't tell how they got there. As we walked down the edge of the yew trees in a Southward direction Hazel and Ash grew to the west of the path.

The soil was clay over a chalk and flint base. At the southern end of the wood the soil was said to be acid, and that we might find gorse growing there; but the path was too overgrown to reach it. Self Heal, Creeping Buttercup and Herb Bennett grew under deciduous trees and violet leaves were to be seen. We also found some liverwort and Lady, Male and Buckler Ferns plus various fungi including parasol and puffballs and some tiny brown toadstools on dead wood. A rare plant of Scented Agrimony is said to grow in the wood but we did not find it. At the far end were a cottage, caravan and dogs barking.

Under a huge ash was a hollow, in the ground where someone had fixed a rubber tyre on a long chain from a branch to make a swing. One of our members measured the girth of several yews. The largest 620 cm measured at 90 cm from the ground.

We were all very grateful to Barbara Last for leading us on this expedition and to Dick for retrieving the stragglers.

*Diana Forbes*

**Saturday 18th November**

## **A Passion for Orchids**

Steve Whitworth

Before projecting his slides, Steve explained, very eloquently, his true passion for orchids. He said that even a rather disappointing botanical outing could be lifted by the discovery of a single common orchid. As one who shares an interest in this subject, I know exactly how he feels.

His first orchid slide was one of the Ladies Slipper Orchid, and went on to tell that after an expedition to Yorkshire which failed to find the Ladies Slipper in flower, (though the leaves were nice) he discovered that it grew in a Wiltshire garden near a local pub.

One of his favourite plants is the Marsh Helleborine, and he showed a slide of some very fine tall specimens (18" plus), which grow in a little known location in the Cotswold Water Park. They were certainly taller than any in my experiences. Steve also showed a very good photo of a fine specimen of the all green variant of the Marsh Helleborine known as var. *ochroleuca*.

While on the subject of helleborines he recounted how he was driven along tortuous small Hampshire lanes to be shown the Sword Leaved Helleborine with its lovely white flowers. He said that the route was so complicated that he has no idea where the plants are to be found!

The diminutive Bog Orchid, from the New Forest was another interesting plant, requiring 'wet knees' to obtain a photograph. The well-lit close-up shot was the best I've seen of this tiny orchid.

Another slide from the marshy Cotswold Water Park site showed a mass of very strong-growing orchid plants. They were probably the hybrid between the Common Spotted Orchid and the Southern Marsh Orchid. They made a lovely display. Steve considers that the differentiation between some of the orchid species is almost impossible, and some botanists have gone too far in raising new varieties, species and sub-species. He prefers to be a 'lumper' rather than a 'splitter'. This is certainly true when regarding the marsh orchids, which, in his words, 'will hybridise with anything'.

One of Steve's favourites is the Lady Orchid and he showed a series of plants from the Vaucluse region of France, which illustrated a variety of floret colour and labellum shape. The British form was shown in a specimen from 'somewhere in

Oxfordshire'. As he pointed out, these large orchids are very similar to a large Burnt Orchid, and, jokingly, could there be a connection?

Following from this, Steve mentioned that the Clattinger Farm Burnt Orchids are much finer and taller than the downland plants, and are of great interest to botanists nationally. He was very enthusiastic about the vast colony of Green Veined Orchids which occur at Clattinger, especially as this species is rapidly declining elsewhere.

Other rarities shown were the Military and Monkey Orchids, some in protective cages, which I suspect Steve dislikes!

For the future Steve intends to more in depth studies of some of the commoner species, such as the Early Purple Orchid. He pointed out how lovely some of these commoner flowers are but sometimes passed by just because they are numerous.

All in all it was an interesting and thought-provoking talk, especially nice as it was delivered in Steve's relaxed style. It ended with a 'tongue in cheek' slide of the charming little Shirt Orchid, blue and white striped, from Western Australia.

*John Tucker*

## **Saturday 9th December 2000**

# **Flowers of Tenerife and Madeira**

Barbara Last

Given the kind of weather we have endured this autumn it was welcome relief to be whisked away, albeit in imagination, to the rather different climate of the Canary Islands.

Tenerife was our first destination. This has an entirely volcanic origin with a central 3,700m mountain, dry slopes to the South, wet in the West, and a northern side with rugged cliffs. We were spared the touristy Southwestern area with its imported white sand covering the local black volcanic residues.

Regular visitors to these winter meetings are familiar with Barbara Last's skills as a photographer. We were not disappointed. She and her husband Dick had endured unusually wet weather to capture many botanical treasures on film.

*Dracaena drago*, the Dragon Tree, gets its name from the exuded coloured resin. This, we were

told, is used for staining violins, as a colouring for lipstick and as a cement for securing loose teeth. We saw Xerophytes including a number of *Euphorbias*, the Old World equivalent of cacti whose latex is used as a purgative, and alien *Opuntias*.

Other genera and species were less familiar. Only the well travelled will recognise such delights as *Aeonium tabuliforme*, *Zygophyllum fontanesii*, *Monanthes polyphylla* and *Astydamia latifolia*. There were many more. I remember *Bryonia verrucosa* with a spectacular squash-like fruit, the magnificent *Echium virescens* on the lower slopes and the xerophytic *Orchis canariensis*.

Madeira, the Island of Wood, is another volcanic island with enormous cliffs. The first visitors were Portuguese who unwittingly started a fire which burned for seven years. These days the island is a well-known tourist centre with a famous wine industry. Paths called levadas which accompany an extensive network of irrigation ditches make fine walks for botanists. The northern end is rugged with a spectacular road. Conditions for photography here were difficult. On occasions Barbara had to resort to the tripod and exposure times of two minutes. We were shown beautiful lichens growing on oaks and ancient laurel forests including Lily of Valley Tree. Tree Heathers covering the hillsides were substantial enough to be used as fencing.

Other highlights included *Watsonia*, a wonderful flower, the signature plant of the BSBI Journal, and a fine orchid, *Dactylorhiza foliosa*. Islands are subject to invasion and there are many introduced species. They include some familiar names: Californian Poppy, the Nile Lily (*Agapanthus*), Cycads, Tree ferns from New Zealand and a species of nettle, *Urtica membranacea* seen in roof gutters. There is also Water Hyacinth choking up the waterways.

Barbara's talks are much more than slide shows. There is a wealth of background detail to augment the very fine photography. The audience was captivated.

*Malcolm Hardstaff*

**Saturday 13th January 2001**

## **‘Tulips in the Tien Shan’**

Jeremy Wood

Jeremy gave an interesting and well-attended talk about an April holiday that he and his wife had taken in Kazakhstan.

**Day I.** They landed in Almaty, but did not think the town had much to recommend it except for the two large churches. These had survived the earthquakes that had devastated most of the old town. They had both been built about 1904 and re-opened in 1995. One of them was built completely with wood, without nails, and was an astonishing show of craftsmanship.

From there they had a twelve-hour coach journey to Djabagly, the village where they were staying. They stopped once in the bleak open landscape to look at some tiny yellow *Tulipa kolpakovskiana*, and after another few hours for a three-course lunch on picnic tables at the side of the road.

They drove over a low rocky pass, where the landscape was very dry. There were small shrubs, mainly the Tien Shan dwarf cherry. A second species, *Tulipa ostrowskiana*, was mainly red with a few orange and one yellow flower. There was also a yellow *Anemone petiolulosa*, *Leontice eversmannii*, which is a herbaceous member of the berberis family (*Berberidaceae*), and the foxtail lily *Eremurus cristatus*.

Djabagly, where the group of fifteen were staying, had a very fine natural history museum. It also had the first nature reserve of the former USSR, protecting a rare mountain sheep, the *Ovis polii* (of Marco Polo). Their guide was Russian and had been director of the Djabagly reserve.

**Day II.** They botanised the valley. Behind the village was a stone marking an ancient burial ground and two curious ancient gaming stones with hollows. Here they had their first sight of *Tulipa kaufmanniana*, which had a red streak on the outside of the yellow petals, and *Fritillaria (Korolkovia) severzovii*. The other side of the valley *Tulipa greigii* was growing among the boulders. There was blossom everywhere from *Prunus mahaleb*, related to the bird cherry found in southern Britain. That day, the picnic came on the back of a pony. They found an unusual tulip with two flowers to a stem, *Tulipa bifloriformis*, and a yellow *Anemone gortschakovii*.

**Day III.** They bussed to the hills of Kara Tau, which were much older geologically, more open and more arid. They hunted for plants in the gorge, finding *Spiraea* and another cherry and, most exciting, *Corydalis schanginii* with yellow

with white spurs (*Corydalis* is usually white).

They walked up the valley; it was a dry scree, and found purple *Ixiolirion tartaricum* and *Allium karataviense*. On the mountains on the way back they found the white form of *Tulipa greigii* and *Eremurus lactiflorus*.

**Day IV.** They took their first pony ride to another part of the reserve, up a steep spur onto a plateau, very high, but a good place for plants. They found *Tulipa turkestanica*, which had a yellow middle and white tip. *Crocus alatavicus* and *Juno orchioides* grew in the snowmelt. After lunch they crossed a patch of snow and had to walk the horses. Down from there they found Aconite alongside *Gymnospermium albertii*, another herbaceous member of the Berberaceae. It was steep and rocky, with a red form of *Tulipa kaufmanniana*.

**Day V.** They drove to a more distant part of the Tien Shan with a very different habitat. They found *Chesnea ternata* and *Rhinopetalum stenanthum* and had an easy walk up a fast flowing stream with birch trees (*Betula talassica*) and yellow tortoiseshell and swallowtail butterflies.

**Day VI.** Another riding day up a valley with willows and *Prunus*, a cliff with a waterfall and *Juno caerulea*, then a long walk to see *Colchicum luteum* and drifts of *Tulipa kaufmanniana*.

**Day VII.** Birding into the Steppes, found the Persian Rose (*Hulthemia persica*), the national emblem of Kazakhstan.

**Day VIII.** They bussed up to a plateau and looked down into a deep gorge with Juniper, *Astragalus*, *Eremurus lactiflorus*, *Tulipa greigii* and Tien Shan Cherry. The hillside was covered with flowers and there was a path leading to the bottom of the gorge. Part of the party took the hard climb to find *Scilla puschkinioides*, but Jane found the best specimen at the top near where they were standing!

**Day IX.** This was last day plant hunting in the mountains, with apricot trees in the background and *Primula algida* near the coach. They had come to see their seventh tulip *Tulipa dasystemon*. The weather closed in and it started to snow, so the holiday ended with lunch in the coach.

*Pamela Soden*

## A puzzle with *Colchicum autumnale*

*Colchicum autumnale*, the Meadow Saffron, grows in Clouts Wood as clumps on the edge of one of the rides. It puts on a fine display of flowers each August or September. A few plants produce pointed, three-angled fruits in the spring.

In spring 1999, I noticed what looked like solitary plants on a steep northwest-facing bank in neighbouring chalk grassland. No flowers appeared in the late summer, but I found several fruiting bodies in the same place in spring 2000. These were clearly from *C. autumnale*, as shown in the photograph below. There were at least 100 plants in the colony, all as individuals rather than as daffodil-like clumps. No flowers appeared during summer and autumn 2000.



*Colchicum autumnale* with a seed pod

I can be certain that the fruit bodies did not come from flowers that had appeared during the



previous summer. I gather that the ovary stays within the bulb during flowering<sup>1</sup>. Can this plant self-pollinate without flowers ever emerging above ground?

I would be glad to hear any comments.

<sup>1</sup> David Hill – personal communication.

*Richard Aisbitt*

## Secretary's Notes

Malcolm Hardstaff is giving up his role as Society Recorder in March.

Jean Wall would be pleased to hear of anyone interested in taking on the job. This involves typing botanical records into a computer. This is done at the end of each season, so does not interfere with fieldwork. The results are sent to the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Record Centre and are also published in the WBS Journal. Malcolm says the task will not be onerous since the major work on the new National Atlas 2000 is completed. He can provide further information.

The committee is indebted to Malcolm for his efficient work in keeping the records since the society was started. We would like to thank him warmly for this.