Newsletter 2024 no.58

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

Bladderwort *Utricularia australis* a new species for Wiltshire

Edited by Martin Buckland

EDITOR'S FIRST PAGE

Welcome to the latest copy of your newsletter. This edition begins with an article of a new species for Wiltshire, Bladderwort *Utricularia australis.*
Next, there is an article of Sycamore Anthracnose disease. This summer I spent some time in East Sussex and was surprised and not a little worried at the number of diseased trees that I saw. I then realised as I got back to Wiltshire that we also had the disease here but perhaps not as severe. This led me to undertake some research and write up a small article.
Also, in this issue are reports of the many field visits undertaken in 2024 and well organised by Fran Sinclair.

New Wiltshire Flora

As many of you will know your committee has been working toward the commencement of writing a new Flora of Wiltshire 2000 – 2024.

At the 2024 AGM there was majority support for a book rather than the information stored on-line only. However, to achieve this we need financial support. The cost of producing a book is around £18,000 but we only have around half of that sum. We have approached several companies, charities, and NGOs for sponsorship and whilst we have had some success we are still in need of financial aid. As a result, we may well turn to our members in the future for assistance either for gifts or loans but for now we will pursue all other options open to us. If you have any suggestions of organisations, we may approach then please let me know.

The Committee is also seeking help with the production of the Flora. Are you able to offer knowledge or skills that will be required with the assembly of the Flora over the next few years, as we move the project forward? Examples are writing preliminary chapters such as, species new to Wiltshire, soils and geology, weather, and climate comparison to the era of the first flora, nature conservation charities and NGO's and the most important habitats in the county.
Any collaboration will need dedication as this is an immense task and is best shared by as many people as possible. Note: meetings are likely to be both in person and online via Zoom or similar.

Martin Buckland
martinbuckland8@gmail.com

Picked Hill © Fran Sinclair

Sycamore Anthracnose

Have you noticed that many of our Sycamores *Acer pseudoplatanus* have branches dying this summer?

This due to a fungal pathogen known as Anthracnose *Apiognomia veneta.* This fungus causes dark, sunken lesions affecting the leaves, twigs, buds, and fruit and is responsible for damage not only to Acers but Planes *Platanus spp.*
The symptoms first begin to show in Spring particularly if the winter and the early months of the year have been mild. The affected trees can defoliate, or the twigs can dieback and, if the blighted areas encircle the stems, restricting the flow of water and nutrients this will kill the young shoots. In addition, this can lead to other diseases such as canker.

Anthracnose infection

Similarly, if a canker also envelops any branch, even large branches, this may eventually kill them. Symptoms present themselves as small, black, fruiting bodies and often occur with dark, stained bark of dead or dying twigs and branches.

The Anthracnose infection does not appear to have a severe impact on the tree and only the odd branch is affected, and the tree usually recovers. Repeated episodes, however, can weaken the tree.

Fungicides are available to control the disease, but this is only a viable option for small trees in an ornamental collection.

The spores of Anthracnose overwinter in leaf litter so in gardens and arboretums it is advisable to rake up the leaves and fallen branches and to burn them. The spores are windblown and can also be rain splashed onto the tree. In addition, if possible, then all infected branches should be removed and destroyed; this will also lessen the chance of being affected by canker.

Martin Buckland

A new bladderwort for Wiltshire

The bladderworts *Utricularia* are a small and fascinating genus of insectivorous aquatic plants of the Lentibulareaceae family (the only other genus in this family is the more familiar butterworts *Pinguicula*). They are so-named because they employ tiny animal-catching bladders to digest and extract nutrients from their prey. Bladderworts are uncommon and in decline. They are indicators of water of low nutrient status and many populations have been lost to eutrophication and/or habitat drainage or destruction.

Bladderworts in Wiltshire

According to Richard Aisbitt, there are widespread Wiltshire records from the 19th century for Greater Bladderwort *U. vulgaris*. The similar species Bladderwort *U. australis* was recognised at the time and included in the floras, although named as *U. major* or *U. neglecta*. As the two plants are similar vegetatively and can only be distinguished by their flowers (which often do not appear), we cannot be certain which species was recorded. There are no recent Wiltshire records for *U. vulgaris*.

Another species, the acid-loving Lesser Bladderwort *U. minor* is widespread in the New Forest and there are a few recent records for it at sites in the Furzley area. This is on the edge of the Forest in VC8 South Wiltshire, but, with boundary changes, is now in administrative Hampshire. There is also a single genuinely Wiltshire 1870 record “in rivulets near the Milk-maid's Grove, close to Salisbury”.

County recorder’s field meeting

In July 2024, the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre hosted a field meeting for its county recorders at Great Wood, near Grittenham. Some WBS members will recall a visit to the wood in late April to enjoy and record its spring woodland flora. The reserve, which includes extensive tracts of ancient woodland on heavy clay soil, has recently been acquired by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT), which is very keen to learn more about its biodiversity.

Sharon and Richard attended the recorder’s event and got on with the job of recording summer species of plant and other additions to April’s species list. The group was led by the indefatigable Nick Self of WWT, who, although interested in our scrutiny of small and obscure plants, had his hands full managing a group of specialists with disparate taxonomic interests.

The pond

Nick eventually led us to a part of the wood where management works had recently been undertaken and an old pond restored. A thriving population of Common Cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* was in flower here, indicating acid soil. According to Nick, the pond is thought to have originated in the garden of a nearby cottage, the remains of which can be seen to the north. The cottage burnt down in the 1950’s or 1960’s and the pond may or may not have received any management thereafter.

In 1993 it was enlarged considerably, leaving a part as an island, much as it is now. Over the course of the next 15-20 years the pond was maintained periodically by Fountain Forestry. Aquatic vegetation was controlled by manual removal, shade was reduced by removing conifers on the banks and a Douglas Fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii* on the island was also removed. However, a Yew *Taxus baccata* on the island and a Cedar-of-Lebanon *Cedrus libani* were retained. Cessation of management occurred around 2021 when Commander Ninian (the previous owner) died, and Fountain Forestry stopped work before the site was sold.

When WWT took over Great Wood in 2023, the pond was almost completely shaded out by aquatic vegetation and overhanging conifers. The Trust did not see (or record) any small yellow flowering plants in 2023, but the shading prevented any real observations of the water. Under funding from BIFFA, WWT restored the pond in January 2024. The works consisted of removing Bulrush *Typha latifolia* and other tall vegetation, extending, reshaping and reprofiling the pond and clearing selected spruce trees on the island.

The pond has a small population of the Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* so work was planned carefully to minimise disturbance. No GCN were found at any time during works, but one Smooth Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris* was moved to a more suitable hibernation location.

Discovery and identification

During the county recorder's visit, Sharon spotted a submerged plant in the pond that superficially resembled a water-milfoil *Myriophyllum*. But when she pulled some out and looked more closely at it, numerous bladders could be seen on its leaves, so it had to be a bladderwort. Any bladderwort would be a highly significant find in VC7, where there are no recent records. However, they are notoriously tricky to identify, and this one had no flowers. Sharon took it home and identified it as either Greater Bladderwort *U. vulgaris* or Bladderwort *U. australis*. Interestingly the books said that flowers might show themselves in August, so Richard, who doesn't live too far away, resolved to return.

By now, Nick had also become very excited about the bladderwort and he kept checking the pond until numerous flowers did appear, when Richard returned to collect and photograph them. The underwater parts of the bladderwort were by then abundant in the pond, with many small spikes of the lemon-yellow flowers rising above the surface. Surviving the extreme danger of wellie-loss on the muddy edges, Richard very carefully packaged up some more bladderwort stems, some very delicate flowers and a bonus stonewort (later identified as *Chara vulgaris*) and despatched them by Special Delivery to Sharon. The flower shape and colour was correct for Bladderwort, as Richard's photos suggested, but as an extra check Sharon dissected the flower spurs and examined them under a compound microscope (Schou et al. 2023) to determine the location of the numerous tiny glands inside. This confirmed Bladderwort, new to Wiltshire.

Further thoughts

So how did it get there? Bladderwort is a good indicator of clean water that is relatively low in nutrients. Its location within the wood likely buffers it from nitrogen and phosphate inputs characteristic of intensive agriculture in a lowland area and the reprofiling of the pond may have removed nutrient-rich sediment. It would have also removed most of the pond's existing aquatic macrophytes, making space for Bladderwort, a poor competitor and often a pioneer of open water. Bladderwort rarely sets viable seed, so the most likely explanation is that it has been brought in by waterfowl. The nearest known population, in the Gordano Valley, Somerset, is a long way for a duck to fly with a bit of weed on its feet!

Stan Coxon, the gamekeeper, has worked at Great Wood for 30 years. Nick says that he insists that he has never seen Bladderwort in the pond before, although he has not really been looking. He has always worked very closely with all the wood's neighbours, so Nick has now tasked him with checking local water bodies to see if anyone else has it.

Great Wood is not currently open to the public, but through Nick, further visits could be organised for WBS in 2025.

References

Schou J.C., Moeslund B., van der Weyer K., Lansdown R.V., Wiegleb G., Holm P., Baastrup-Spohr L. & Sand-Jensen K. 2023. Aquatic Plants of Northern and Central Europe including Britain and Ireland. Princeton University Press.

Sharon Pilkington, Richard Aisbitt and *Nick Self*

[Martin Buckland can confirm that there was a small overgrown pond here in 1974]

Utricularia australis © Richard Aisbitt

Great Wood, Grittenham

April 28th 2024

Leaders: Nick Self and Dave Green

[These are the write-ups from three individual leaders and some of the comments and species may be repeated.]

1. Great Wood is an Ancient Woodland site and a recent acquisition by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and so our society took the opportunity to visit here with a view to record in three of the four 1 km squares that it covers.
We were met by Nick Self of the Trust who gave us a briefing and explained the history of the wood together with how the Trust managed the purchase of the site. He also explained the recent work that has been undertaken to open up the rides and the start of the clear felling within some areas of conifers that were planted by the previous owner as a cash crop.

It was decided that we would split into three groups to cover as much of the area as possible. Fortunately, the woodland is divided by several rides and paths making it easy to traverse. Historically, Great Wood is known for its very high concentration of Wild Service *Sorbus torminalis* trees and all three groups came across at least a few during their surveys.

My group recorded in the section that took in the upper slope and drier sections of the wood and we were fortunate enough to still be at the height of the spring flowering season with sections of the woodland with sheets of Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and the occasional specimens of Early-purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*, and Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina.* Lower in this section there were wet areas widely covered with Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula*. Overall, the woodland is dominated by Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* standards that were planted perhaps 150 years ago together with an understorey of Hazel *Corylus avellana*. Further sections of the woodland were dominated by Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* with other compartments where Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* became frequent. We searched diligently for the Midland Hawthorn, *Crataegus laevigata* that was historically known in this area and although one or two true bushes were identified, a much larger number of the hybrid, *Crataegus* x *media* was found instead.

Dave Green

2. Although some of Great Wood had been recorded in the past, a spring visit was deemed a worthy idea to improve the species list and in turn the knowledge of the area. My group were perhaps the luckiest for we did not have far to walk from where we parked our cars. We headed back down the track toward the entrance recording one side before returning up the other. It did not take long to build up a list and the pace was quite slow due the number of species we found such as Hemp-agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia* and Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon.* A very good observation was of a Slender St. John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum.*

Coming across a Hawthorn species enabled us to discuss its merit as a true Midland Hawthorn *Crataegus* x *media* but whilst many of the flowers had the expected double stigmas the leaves were too much like the common Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna,* so we had to settle for it being a hybrid. (See Dave's comment above). Returning up the drive we noted the remnants of the previous conifer planting with many seedlings or young saplings of Western Red-cedar *Thuja plicata*, Norway Spruce *Picea abies* and Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus.*

Moving toward the western edge of Great Wood I was very fortunate in having Sarah Shuttleworth and Sam Braine with me for they clearly had an exceptional eye for plants. Firstly, Sarah found a small group of Hairy Woodrush *Luzula pilosa* and shortly after stopped to view a small vetch. After a little deliberation it was identified as Bitter-vetch *Lathyrus linifolius.* In addition, a diminutive plant,

not more than two or three leaves was recognised by Sarah as Sanicle *Sanicula europaea.* The expertise did not stop there for then Sam spotted a group of ferns that he had an idea they were the sub-species of Scaly Male-fern *Dryopteris affinis ssp. borreri* and close observation proved that they were. Other ferns seen on the day were Male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, Buckler-fern *D. dilitata* and Narrow Buckler-fern *D. carthusiana.*

Martin Buckland

3. Part ancient woodland and part managed forestry, Great Wood was purchased recently by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve. Forestry operations have continued, cropping the remaining non-native trees and the wood is not yet open to the public.

Nick Self of WWT had invited WBS to visit the wood and survey it botanically; a group of us joined him to do this. It is a large wood that covers four Ordnance Survey kilometre squares, and we split into three groups, each taking a square (we left out the fourth square, which only covers a small corner of the wood) and set off with recording cards and notebooks.

What did we find? The wood has many Wild Service-trees *Sorbus torminalis*, a rather scarce and attractive ancient woodland indicator tree. Dave Green (our WBS leader for the day) and Martin Buckland have mapped these over the past few years, but we added a few more to their list. What else? First, there were a number of species that had not been recorded in the wood before, some of these obviously missed by previous visitors. The more interesting were: Moschatel Adoxa *moschatellina*; Velvet Bent *Agrostis canina*; Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina*; Midland Hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*; its hybrid, *Crataegus x media* (*C. monogyna* x *laevigata*); Scaly Male-fern Dryopteris *borreri*; Buckthorn *Rhamnus cathartica*; Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*; Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia*; and Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra*.

There were many other species previously but still good to see; they included Betony *Betonica officinalis*; Hairy-brome *Bromopsis ramosa*; Thin-spiked Wood-sedge *Carex strigosa*; Pignut *Conopodium majus*; Narrow Buckler-Fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*; Slender St John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum*; Bitter-vetch *Lathyrus linifolius*; Common Cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*; Wood Melick *Melica uniflora*; Wood Millet *Milium effusum*; Three-nerved Sandwort *Moehringia trinervia*; Early-purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*; Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana*; Heath Speedwell *V.* officinalis.
Also, and not-so-nice, were patches of Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* however some of these had already been cut and treated.

So, we had lots of good finds, made separate lists for each kilometre square (previous surveys were for the wood as a whole) and added several new plants to this species-rich, somewhat acidic ancient woodland.

Richard Aisbitt

Melampyrum pratense

Wylye Down NNR
May 5th 2024
Leaders: Anne Appleyard and Sue Fitzpatrick

The spectacular chalk grassland of Wylye Down was a real treat on the day. Under the expert leadership of Anne and Sue, the group spent a blissful day wandering over the downs searching for early spring specialties. The chalk grassland was uniformly short with a very species-rich sward. The 'ant-scape' was stunning, and it was definitely the day of the anthills, and much time was spent admiring the intimate mosaics of plant species on each mound. No anthill was the same!

To start with, we spent a period looking at little white 'jobs' on anthills, where there was much potential for confusion! We were looking for the little, annual Mouse-ears *Cerastium spp.* and there were plenty of sneaky imposters ready to catch us out, such as Common whitlow-grass *Erophila verna* which was abundant, and Thyme-leaved sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia*. There was also plenty of *Cerastium fontanum* Common Mouse-ear which was frequently masquerading as something more interesting! The search was fruitful however, for we found Little Mouse-ear *Cerastium semi-decandrum* which really is tiny, and was already starting to go over, it is characterized by upper bracts with a long scarious tip at least one-third of the total length. We also found the delicate Sea Mouse-ear *Cerastium diffusum* with its entire herbaceous bracts, which is occasionally found inland, despite its name. Although we didn't find Dwarf Mouse-ear *Cerastium pumilum,* previously recorded on the site, I certainly felt much happier with my Cerastium identification by the end of the day!

The anthills yielded many other lovely species, such as Early Forget-me-not *Myosotis ramosissima* and Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, the latter not yet in flower. Straying away from plants, a frequent species on the anthills was the uncommon Rose-moss *Rhodobryum roseum*, a striking moss indicative of well-drained and nutrient-poor soils, and therefore typically associated with species-rich grassland.
There were more early season treats in flower as we continued moseying across the lovely chalk grassland. We were treated to a spectacular display of Early Purple orchids *Orchis mascula* and Cowslips *Primula veris* at our lunch spot. As we descended the slope, we saw a white haze spread along the valley bottom, this turned out to be the blowsy beautiful flowers of Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*. And to cap it all off, Green-winged Orchids *Anacamptis morio* on the slopes on the way home.
Thanks to Anne and Sue for a spectacularly good day.

Jenny Bennett

Saxifraga granulata © Jenny Bennett

Anthill landscape © Jenny Bennett

Sutton Lane Meadows SSSI
May 25th 2024
Leaders: Sam Braine and Kat Newbert

Just twelve of us including two new members met at a lay-by in Sutton Lane before commencing down a delightful track with hedges on both sides: one with a ditch held numerous plants of Winter-cress *Barbarea vulgaris.*

We paused at the entrance of the reserve where Joanne Radway of the National Trust gave us a breakdown of the site and its important flora, not least as a County Wildlife Site but as a SSSI. Sam Braine provided us with a general introduction to all from our Society. The reserve consists of three fields of which two are particularly rich in plant species and described as neutral unimproved grassland. The soils consist of alluvial gravels overlying Oxford Clay resulting in the lower parts of the reserve lying almost permanently wet. The fields are cut for hay in late summer and grazed later in the autumn.

There is a sizeable population of Green-winged Orchids *Orchis morio* however these had all but gone over at our visit; a few Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* but a more generous number of Southern Marsh-orchids (SMO) The latter needed counting therefore we split our group into two teams with one going on to count the SMOs and the other undertaking a general record of all species.

In places the ground flora was dominated by Lesser Trefoil *Trifolium dubium,* and I wondered at the time how many of us mistake this species for the similar looking Black-medick *Medicago lupulina* instead, although I did find some of these herbs near the entrance gate. It is always nice to see Ragged-robin *Silene flos-cuculi* with just a few plants seen in one field but with many more in another, so it was a surprise to many therefore, when I mentioned to members that the flower has now become 'Near Threatened' on England's Red Data list.

Downy Oat-grass *Avenula pubescens* was frequent across the site almost forming a haze of seed-heads and there was the occasional plant of Meadow Brome *Bromus racemosus*. A few species were discovered that were indicators of ancient meadows, not least Pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus* and Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum.* We also found a small group of Meadow Saffron *Colchicum autumnale* (just the leaves) that sadly were being trampled as a footway desire line went straight through them.

It was a good day for Sedges to be admired and identification details to be discussed. We saw, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* that could be compared with Carnation Sedge *C. panicea;* Spiked Sedge *C. spicata* with another spiky species, False-Fox-sedge *C. otrubae.* Also on the day, Lesser Pond-sedge *C. acutiformis,* Pendulous Sedge *C. pendula,* Hairy Sedge *C. hirta* and Oval Sedge *C. leporina.*

When we had finished at the meadows, we had a quick look at the nearby River Avon to catch up on a few riverine species. Yellow Water-lily *Nuphar lutea* was just beginning to flower and there was a large stand of Common Club-rush *Schoenoplectus lacustris*. A Mustard plant at the muddy margin was almost certainly Black Mustard *Brassica nigra* but the plant we did not want to see was several small groups of the invasive Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera,* so we pulled many of these up.

Plant of the day? Walking back along the track, Kat Newbert called out for us to look at three small shrubs. The leaves a little like Buckthorn *Rhamnus cathartica,* but it did not look right for that species and so it was a very pleasant surprise when Kat informed us that they were Wild Pear *Pyrus pyraster,* surely a new species to the majority stood there. As we went to walk on, we realised that behind these shrubs stood a 10m. tree of the same. And so, our shrubs were either suckers or self-seeders from the mother tree. A good finish to the day indeed.


Pyrus pyraster

Martin Buckland

Winterbourne Gunner MOD
June 2nd 2024
Leaders: Jenny Bennett (WBS), Steve Hardicre (MOD)

This visit, arranged by Jenny Bennett, provided us with an opportunity to look at MOD land for which there is no public access. We were welcomed by Steve and Bob of the MOD and shown plans to introduce us to the site.

Setting out, we were soon finding quite a range of arable weeds and ruderals including Henbit Dead-nettle *Lamium amplexicaule* and Small Toadflax *Chaenorhinum minus*. Through the checkpoint, we looked at areas of flower-rich mown grass and discovered Bulbous Buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus,* Spotted Medick *Medicago arabica* and Early Forget-me-not *Myosotis ramossissima.* The edges provided some interesting finds such as Knotted Hedge Parsley *Torilis nodosa* and Rue-leaved Saxifrage *Saxifraga tridactylites*, that was very abundant.

As we walked through the training area towards the old camp, plants were finding a foothold in and on the edges of hardstanding including abundance of Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre* and Sea Mouse-ear *Cerastium diffusum,* the latter seen at a previous visit to Wylye Downs NNR on anthills, a very different environment. The old camp, cleared of buildings, has been colonised by mixed scrub, but with a very diverse flora in clearings and alongside the many tracks. We saw Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and Common-spotted Orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsia* along with flowering Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale* as well as the delicate Long- stalked Crane's-bill *Geranium columbinum*.

One glade had the uncommon Basil Thyme *Clinopodium acinos*, Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella ssp. amarella* along with a carpet of Restharrow *Ononis repens*. We had lunch among Shining Crane's-bill *Geranium lucidum* and spotted some Small-flowered Sweet-briar *Rosa micrantha* with its apple-scented glandular leaves nearby.

In contrast, after a comfort break back at base with welcome drinks provided for us on a hot day the afternoon saw us transported in golf-buggies up onto the hill which adjoins the Figsbury Ring Hill Fort, with Martin Buckland and Sarah Grinsted volunteering to drive two of these This saved us quite a walk!

Once there, we walked through wide rides with chalk grassland maintained by cutting back the scrub providing many typical species including Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Salad Burnet *Poterium sanguisorba,* Cowslip *Primula veris*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum,* Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* with Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis* just coming into flower. Walking further on we reached a wooded area with parts very open because of Ash dieback clearance. The site of a bonfire yielded records of both Weld *Reseda luteola* and Wild Mignonette *R. lutea*, together with Parsley Piert *Aphanes arvensis*. Now very warm and with many of us flagging, the golf-buggies were used to take us back down the hill to our start point.

Apart from being a very enjoyable visit with a wide variety of both familiar and less familiar plants, the visit contributed to the collection of many plant records for two monads from an otherwise inaccessible area and in turn gave the MOD information how to protect the site and species growing there.

The participants very much appreciated the hospitality shown by the MOD staff and many thanks are due to them and to Jenny for arranging the visit.

Anne Appleyard

Woodborough Hill and Picked Hill

June 8th 2024

Leader Hannah Howells

Hannah Howells arranged this 'records for access' visit with two farm landowners who are keen to support biodiversity. The farms are just off the downs and into the Vale of Pewsey greensand with two small chalk ridges, which were once isolated grazing with crops in between that necessitated transporting stock from one area to the other via very narrow lanes. By cooperation between the farmers, they are now linked via a stretch of arable reversion so once a year stock moves through there from one chalk ridge to the other. Seed for the arable reversion was brush harvested from Tytherington and management in the early years was a late hay cut but it is now grazed when the cattle move through. Brown Carder Bee and Large Scabious Bee have been recorded there.

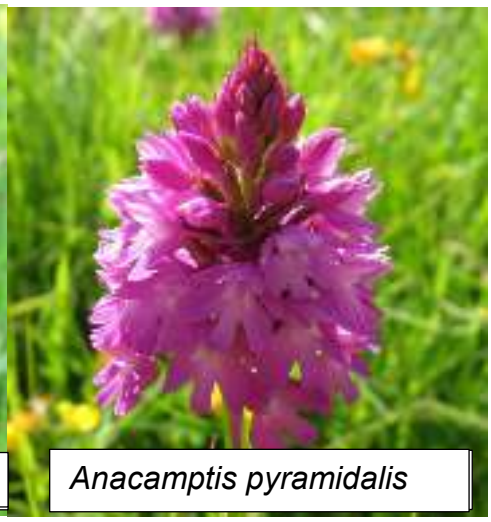
A brisk uphill walk on Woodborough Hill initially brought us to a large field containing more Sainfoin *Onobrychis viciifolia* than most of us had ever seen; this has not been sown in living memory, so presumably it remains in the seed bank. Amongst it were plenty of different grasses along with Common Spotted Orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, a few Twayblades *Neottia ovata*, fruiting spikes of Green-winged Orchids *Anacamptis morio* and Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor* among other herbs.

After lunch and out of the wind, with splendid views we moved down into the arable reversion, which was a sea of Ox-eye Daisies *Leucanthemum vulgare* and Meadow Buttercups *Ranunculus acris* with many of the previous species mentioned above, including carpets of Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*; with other herbs such as Beaked Hawk's-beard *Crepis vesicaria* and Goat's-beard, or Jack-go-go-bed-at-noon, *Tragopogon pratensis*, which had, of course, gone to bed by then.

The lower slopes of the second chalk ridge, Picked Hill, were rather rank but as we climbed and reached the terraces on the western and southern slopes, we encountered short turf with the expected but always delightful chalkland species. There was plenty of Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Wild Thyme T*hymus polytrichus*, Fragrant and Bee Orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea* and *Ophrys apifera*, and the pervasive, refreshing scent of Salad Burnet *Poterium sanguisorba* every time we knelt down to examine the plants. Pat Woodruffe won the search for Bastard Toadflax *Thesium humifusum* and, as seems to be usual with this species, once found there was more of it than we had begun to think, though only one plant was already in flower.
Our return walk took us once again through the mass of Ox-eye daisies, picking up a few more records as we went. It was really a wonderful day out; thank you very much for setting this up, Hannah!

Fran Sinclair

Anacamptis morio



Anacamptis pyramidalis

Throope Down
June 15th 2024

Leader: Sam Braine

Sam knew the owners of Throope Down and had gained permission to visit the site. We parked in front of the Manor House, and he outlined the history of the SSSI site, listing some of the chalk downland specialists that had not been recorded there for some time.
We walked up to our first field, which was stunning in the variety and abundance of chalk downland plants. The short yellow-green foliage of Dwarf Sedge *Carex humilis* was more like a lawn than the occasional clump that we normally find, even on the best chalk downland. What else did we see? Bastard Toadflax *Thesium humifusum*, Chalk Fragrant-orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and most of the other usual suspects. With non-downland plants, we clocked up 157 species, covering most of the not-seen-for-a-while species. What didn't we see? We had hoped for Field Fleawort *Tephroseris integrifolius* and Burnt Orchid *Neotinea ustulata*, but unfortunately, they were not to be found.
This site has a steep west-facing slope and from there we moved on to another area that also looked promising, a north-east facing slope that was another compartment of the Throope Down SSSI. However, the grass here was much lusher and had many fewer chalk downland plants. Well, we had had our treats.
Thanks to Sam for expert guiding and to the owners for their hospitality.
The site is well worth a visit. It is open access land and so no permission is needed. Park in Bishopstone and walk up.

Richard Aisbitt, June 2024

Gymnadenia conopsea

Gymnadenia conopsea White form

Emmett Hill Meadows
June 30th 2024
Leader: Nick Self

Hot on the heels of the visit to Great Wood, this field trip took in another Wiltshire Wildlife Trust site that had not been visited for quite some time. Emmett Hill Meadows is a small, but diverse Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It has some quite unique features, consists of five hectares of unimproved grassland and was bought by the Trust in 1987, the same year that it was notified as a SSSI. In addition to the meadows the reserve includes a tiny copse, some scrub patches, two ponds, a series of ditches and a stream.

The two largest meadows, Long Meadow, and Pignut Meadow are connected by the much smaller Middle Meadow. This field contains the largest pond, the stream, and the copse.

A National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey was carried out in 2002. Long Meadow was classified as MG5c *Cynosurus cristatus - Centaurea nigra* grassland*, Danthonia decumbens* sub-community. Whilst Pignut Meadow was classified as a mixture of MG5c and U4 *Festuca ovina - Agrostis capillaris - Galium saxatile* grassland. This is the only U4 acidic grassland community in WWT ownership as far as I am aware.

Thirteen people gathered at the start point and I led the group around the site. We were also fortunate to be accompanied by reserve warden, local historian, councillor, Adrian Read.

Upon entering the site, we were presented with Long Meadow, aptly named for it is a long and narrow meadow. The first thing that struck us was the profusion of Betony *Betonica officinalis*, including some lovely looking white examples.

Other species seen in this field included Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and a very large patch of the beautiful Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*. Both these species are uncommonly seen except in unimproved grassland. Meadow Thistle in particular, is not often seen on WWT sites other than Clattinger Farm and so it is pleasing to see such a big patch here.

From a management perspective, it was good to see plenty of Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*. This species is the larval food plant for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* of which there is a population in Long Meadow. This butterfly does not usually do well in hay cut meadows because the eggs and larvae can be destroyed by the cutting machinery. To improve upon this situation, we have purchased fields adjacent at Upper Minety Meadows. These are being restored to a state where they can provide more habitat and act as a corridor for the Fritillary to move through the local landscape.

Pignut Meadow, as its name suggests is awash with Pignut *Conopodium majus*. If you visit in late April or May, the whole field is covered with it. Pignut also has its own associated Lepidoptera. The Chimney Sweeper Moth *Odezia atrata* is an attractive, small day-flying moth that is a delight to see. Pignut survives a mixture of plant communities, including an acidic grassland community that is very unusual in Wiltshire outside of the New Forest. Ecologically, the field is a remnant of the acidic soils on the historic Stonehill Heath. Some of the characteristic species of heathland are still present including Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis*, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* of which all three were seen.

Five species of the *Potentilla* genus were recorded. Silverweed *P. anserina*, Creeping Cinquefoil *P. reptans,* Tormentil *P. erecta*, and Trailing Tormentil *P. anglica* was identified by Dave Green along with the hybrid *P. anglica x reptans* that confirmed by pollen staining and a lack of fruiting.

There are problems however, in Pignut Meadow. The proliferation of some of the coarser grass species was very clear to see. There have been some problems with hay cutting this field because

the Trust's modern machinery is too big to fit over the bridge in Middle Meadow. Therefore, over the last few years, we have relied quite heavily on summer grazing with cattle to keep the coarse species at bay. To compound the issues, this summer we have had to contend with a bout of Bovine Tb. Meaning that we have not been able to graze the field either! Fortunately, after discussions around options with Dave Green and others, I have been able to contact with a contractor that has machinery small and light enough to cross the bridge. Pignut Meadow will now be cut this summer after all.

At the end of the day 70 species were recorded in Long Meadow and 89 species in Middle Meadow and Pignut combined.

I do hope everyone had as good a day as I did; I look forward to seeing you all at the next event.

Nick Self

Betonia officinalis © Karen Andrews

Cirsium dissectum

Succisa pratensis © Karen Andrews

Ravensroost Wood
July 14th 2024
Leaders: Nick Self and Richard Aisbitt

The Ravensroost Wood visit went ahead at the second attempt. Martin Buckland originally planned the walk in 2023, but adverse weather led to its postponement into 2024 with Nick Self and Richard Aisbitt ably running the day.

After Nick's introduction to this remnant of ancient woodland, we set off expectantly in search of Violet Helleborines *Epipactis purpurata* and Bird's-nest Orchids *Neottia nidus-avis.* We found the canes that Nick had used to mark the locations of helleborines for the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in past years and we spread out eagerly through the trees but despite a thorough search, we failed to find a single plant of either species. Two potential causes were suggested: 2024's poor weather and nibbling herbivores. Or was a combination of the two to blame?

Disappointed to miss the most eagerly anticipated highlights of the day, we moved on hopefully, to the woodland rides. Here we found further evidence of the year's extraordinary weather conditions. Sarah's eagle eyes spotted Hairy Bindweed, *Calestegia pulchra*. Purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* abounded, treating the rides as if they were in its more familiar wetland habitat. The exuberance of the loosestrife, however, was outshone by a gigantic Hairy-brome *Bromopsis ramosa*. It towered over Sharon. (below left)

We had planned to take lunch on the benches beside the old huntsman's hut. However, bees had taken up residence. The hut was abuzz with their constant comings and goings over the two benches, so we thought it best to find an alternative lunch spot under the tree canopy a little further on.

Alison Robinson films the comings and goings of the bees that had taken over our intended lunch spot.

Our eventual lunch spot under the tree canopy was interesting as Nick updated us on the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust plans and changes.
Continuing, we found some of our most interesting finds of the day came from the many ponds not least Curly Waterweed *Lagarosiphon major*. (below)

Lagarosiphon major © Karen Andrews

By the end of the day, we had recorded five *Juncus* and five *Carex* species. We also found Small Pondweed *Potamogeton berchtoldii* and Broad-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton natans.* Sharon Pilkington took away some aquatic specimens that she later confirmed as Lesser-bearded Stonewort *Chara curta and Narrow-leaved Water-plantain Alisma lanceolatum.* In addition, a study with botanical keys identified Common Yellow-sedge, *Carex demissa*

Richard's total count for the day was 79 species. The highlight of the day was a truly magnificent Wild Service Tree, *Sorbus torminalis*. A great day was had by all, and we thank our organisers and leaders, Nick and Richard.

Carex demissa © □r□□S□□□□r

Sorbus torminalis © *Fra□□Sinclair*

Smallbrook Meadows
July 20th 2024
Leader: Kat Newbert

We had been warned that Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* was making a takeover bid at this small site but still found plenty of plants beside the path and visible in the marshy areas of tall sedges - mostly Lesser Pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis,* grasses, including Reed Sweet Grass *Glyceria maxima,* and Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus* displaying its fat seed pods.

In the wet woodland we ventured off the main path to admire carpets of Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, and found the first, pristine specimen of a good number of Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus.* We found ourselves collecting Willowherb species and over the course of the day found seven: Great Willowherb,*Epilobium hirsutum*, Square-stemmed Willowherb *E. tetragonum*, Pale Willowherb *E. roseum*, American Willowherb *E. ciliatum*, Short-fruited Willowherb, *E. obscurum*, Broad-leaved Willowherb *E. montanum*, and Marsh Willowherb *E. palustre*.

A particular surprise, just before we entered the first meadow, was a single plant of Bullwort *Ammi majus,* presumably from birdseed Two of our number had to leave at this point, so just four of us headed into the shade of a Walnut tree *Juglans regia* for lunch, looking down over the meadow and River Weare. After lunch we paused to admire a Roesel's Bush Cricket *Roeseliana roeselii* in the meadow before studying the flora of the marshy area by the river. The chief find was the Hybrid Water Speedwell *V. x lackschewitzii.* There were also good clumps of Celery-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus.*

After a slight diversion we headed back the way we had come and then investigated the recreation area beside the River Wylye on the other side of the car park. We found nothing of note here but the river itself was very pleasant, as was the whole day.

Fran Sinclair

Senecio aquaticus © Fran Sinclair

Ranunculus sceleratus © Fran Sinclair

Great Bedwyn and Chisbury Wood
August 3rd 2024
Leader: Jane Brown

This botanist considered that there were several (arguably) compelling reasons to attend this field meeting. Firstly, soaring temperatures over the preceding week had produced a frustrating sense of cabin fever. Secondly, this far eastern part of the county has a lot of acid woodland that is scarce elsewhere and therefore interesting species often turn up. But it was the description in the WBS programme that made it utterly irresistible…'in the past, six species of willowherb *Epilobium* have been recorded here.' Now that is exciting. But would we find them?

In the event, only five of us, plus Jane Brown, our leader, turned up. But botanical wonders greeted us even where we parked next to the church in Great Bedwyn. Fran spotted a very nice population of Black Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* growing on a flint wall. This was much admired, more so than our first willowherb of the day, it must be said. American Willowherb *Epilobium ciliatum* growing in the wall-pavement angle by our cars led to the first of many discussions during the day about lobed vs clavate stigmas, hair types and petiole length.

Walking through the village toward Chisbury Wood, we found Trailing St. John's-wort *Hypericum humifusum* in a lawn and the ubiquitous but small and widely ignored Slender Pearlwort *Sagina filicaulis*.

Once at the wood, we paid homage to a known population of Common Cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* on a road verge. It was in flower, and duly admired, along with other interesting associates in a rather strange vegetation community…Creeping-Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* and two hawkweeds *Hieracium* which were clearly distinct but not well grown enough to be worthy of collection for identification. Heath False-brome *Brachypodium pinnatum* grew elsewhere on the same bank, a species of clay, not chalk/limestone, unlike the very similar and oft-confused Tor-grass *B. rupestre*.

On entering the pleasant coolness of the wood, we sought out a small pond shown on the Ordnance Survey map. This was an old pond that until recently held water. We found it obscured by trees and it was too shaded and full of dead leaves to be of any interest, but it drew us to a lovely bank covered in luxuriant Great Woodrush *Luzula sylvatica*. Low-lying damp ground at its base produced our second willowherb of the day – Short-fruited Willowherb *E. obscurum*, a species of damp places. It looks like the common (but under-recorded) Square-stalked Willowherb *E. tetrapterum* with square stems as its name suggest and it has shorter fruits than others.

After a pleasant picnic lunch, Jane led us to Bewley Pond. Along the way we enjoyed other acidic ground flora, including Slender St. John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum* and Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. The pond itself was disappointing. A large population of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 9 invasive New Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii* covered much of it and other than (flat) Fat Duckweed *Lemna gibba* and a few other common emergent species, there was little else to see.

On our return, we decided to explore the wood from different paths, which proved productive for finding more plants of interest. Along the way there were Compact Rush *Juncus conglomeratus* and Soft-rush *J. effusus* to compare, Hairy Wood-rush *Luzula pilosa* and some pill-less tufts of Pill Sedge *Carex pilulifera*. Chisbury Wood's botanical diversity reflects its geological complexity – its soils are variously derived from underlying chalk, clay and silt, and it has a couple of small, flushed gullies at the intersection of permeable and impermeable strata. Though heavily shaded, these proved interesting, supporting Hard-fern *Blechnum spicant* on dry (acid) ground and Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* in the (neutral) flush. I was very pleased to find a couple of locally rare bryophytes here – the locally rare moss *Dicranum montanum* on rotting wood, the thallose liverwort *Pellia neesiana* and *Sphagnum auriculatum*, which, although a

common and widespread species elsewhere, has only ever been verified from one other place in VC7.

The track above the gullies was also interesting. Karen Andrews struck out on a determined willowherb hunt and was rewarded by finding Broad-leaved *Epilobium montanum*, Square-stalked *E. tetragonum,* Great *E. hirsutum* and Hoary *E. parviflorum*. A candidate for the elusive Spear-leaved Willowherb *E. lanceolatum* disappointed and was summarily dismissed as yet more American Willowherb *E. ciliatum*. Other damp ground along the same track gave us Bristle Club-rush *Isolepis setacea* (first recorded in Chisbury Wood in 2013), Jointed Rush *J. articulatus* and Tufted Forget-me-not *Myosotis laxa*.

Chisbury Wood has been well recorded recently, but notwithstanding that, our meeting produced records of at least eight new species – including the American Willowherb. So, overall, it was an excellent day, and we achieved our goal of six willowherbs and found much else besides in this fascinating area. Our thanks go to Jane Brown, who led us very nimbly on her two new hips.

Sharon Pilkington

Melampyrum pratense

Fran with un-identified *Hieracium* © Sharon Pilkington

Isolepsis setacea © Sharon Pilkington

Pepperbox Hill
August 25th 2024
Leader: Pat Woodruffe and Alex Rose

This meeting centred around site management as well as the plants that flourish on this National Trust (NT) reserve. The site manager, Alex Rose, joined us as well as the grazier, Tim. Tim's Shetland Sheep were on site until the end of May and came back again just before the meeting. This has resulted in an herb rich, short turf which reaches its flowering peak in mid-August. Pepperbox Hill has been a local picnic area since it came into the hands of NT in 1934. It is well known for its Juniper population as well as its chalk grassland species including, over the years, ten species of orchid. The quality of the grassland has fluctuated over time, and it was the role of grazing in bringing it back into a particularly good condition that was the focus of this meeting.

Rabbits played a significant part in keeping the sward in a positive state until the arrival of *Myxomatosis* in 1950s. After this Upright Brome *Bromopsis erecta* gradually became dominant over much of the site where scrub had not invaded. From the late 1980s several management tools were tried – mowing, horses, and Belted Galloway to name but a few - while at about the turn of the century a significant amount of young woodland was cleared. Follow up management of Brambles *Rubus fruticosus agg*., first by mechanical means and then by grazing, has allowed this area to become a sea of colour in the summer and a mecca for insects – although, as is the case generally, this summer has been exceptionally poor for many invertebrates.

Over the years the Wiltshire Botanical Society has helped to monitor the site. In 2005 we joined forces with Plantlife to record the numbers and health of the Juniper on site while in 2006 a request was made for a survey of all the scrub on-site. This was carried out with the help of many members and in 2007 Anne Appleyard and I produced a report highlighting, in particular, the roses and their hybrids on site. We were not experts on the subject but so little was known that all help was gratefully received. Our thoughts on ways of maintaining an acceptable ratio of grassland to scrub were also acted upon and it is gratifying to know that WBS work has helped to guide the management of the site.

The Autumn Lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* promised in the programme were present in some of the oldest established turf, but numbers can fluctuate widely from year to year. By the late 1980s it was becoming clear that the sward was dominated by coarse grasses and therefore unsuitable. Fortunately, tiny plants hung on and, now that the management is so much better, they are thriving once again.

After lunch we walked across the hilltop to a part of Deanhill Farm where fields had been set aside since 1988 before which it was arable land. With permission from the farmer, we recorded in this area and managed to find 112 species. As it is not grazed, the turf was generally much taller than that on Pepperbox Hill, but we did find some Autumn Gentians *Gentianella amarella*, Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, Blue Fleabane *Erigeron acris* and Ploughman's-spikenard *Inula conyzae* amongst the more common species associated with establishing chalk grassland. The greatest surprise was a group of Basil Thyme *Clinopodium acinos* on some disturbed ground. The plants were minute but sharp eyes spotted them and they were greatly admired.

Our thanks to NT staff and to the local farmer not only for allowing us to visit but also for their work in managing these rich habitats. Grateful thanks also to Anne Appleyard for keeping track of the many records that were shouted in her direction during the afternoon.

Pat Woodruffe

Spiranthes spiralis © Pat Woodruffe

Gentianella amarella

Clinopodium acinos © Pat Woodruffe

Keyhaven Marshes, Hampshire
September 7th 2024
Leader: Fran Sinclair

Ten brave souls met in the car park expecting rain (see article of the trip to the New Forest next) however, in the end it kept dry until the end of the day.

On entering the gate to the coastal path we were greeted with the ubiquitous Sea Couch *Elymus athericus* and Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris ssp. Maritima.* It didn't take long for Richard Aisbitt and Kat Newbert to get into a ditch and the surrounding wet areas and it didn't take long to find Saltmarsh Rush *Juncus gerardii* . The Sea Rush Juncus *maritimus* is common at the coast but attractive enough for many to photograph it. Still in the wet marsh a population of Parsley Water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii* was found and appreciated by everyone.

On to the beach where Common Orache A*triplex patula* was discussed for here with salinity it has much larger, fleshier leaves than inland. Another family member, Grass-leaved Orache *Atriplex littoralis* was also present. Sea Mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum behind the strandline gave* a good impression of the similar, arable Scentless Mayweed *T. inodorum.* Also here was Golden-samphire *Limbarda crithmoides* although that was beginning to go over it was still very impressive.

The tidal mudflats provided an area rich in Common Cord-grass *Spartina anglica.* Described by many authorities as an invasive plant, it does protect mudflats and salt marshes from erosion.
Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum* that apparently tastes of carrot but no-one tried it. This Samphire is usually found on rocky areas and cliffs but was found instead on the sandy edges against the adjacent path. We also admired Sea Arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima* that contains cyanide in its leaves and has caused the death of horses and other animals; nobody tried this either! I In the marsh it was very unusual to find Red Goosefoot *Chenopodium rubrum* a plant that is more often found around animal muck heaps.

Turning inland, a few of us walked in a grassed area below the footpath and were fortunate to find some Strawberry Clover *Trifolium fragiferum.* Most plants had finished flowering but a couple still had some pink flowers. At the edge of the footpath, we were very pleased to come across a single flowering plant of Hairy Buttercup *Ranunculus sardous.* We were fooled at the start for it had reflexed sepals very similar to Bulbous Buttercup *R. bulbosus* however this individual had spreading hairs throughout the plant.

Just a little further on we were gratified to see many Marsh-mallow *Althaea officinalis* a very distinct and attractive herb with light pink flowers. As a last treat we came across several flowering plants of Lesser Centaury C*entaurium pulchellum* separated from its cousin species by having parallel sided leaves.

We had finished the day just in time for light rain began to fall but this didn't spoil our day. Many thanks are due to Pat Woodruffe and Anne Appleyard for undertaking a recce for this meeting.

Martin Buckland


Althaea officinalis


Ranunculus sardous

Pigbush, New Forest, Hampshire
September 8th 2024
Leader: Kat Newbert

A magnificent seven met in the pouring rain at Pigbush car park and decided that we would not be deterred by mere weather. We planned to follow the recommended circular route – of which more later. Our first plants were Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Bell Heather *Eric cinerea*, attractively complemented by Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*. Pat Woodruffe and Sue Fitzpatrick knew where to look for Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* and therefore we all drifted down from drier heath into the menthol-scented Bog Myrtle *Myrica gale*, where we found enough of the gentians to delight even though the flowers were not quite open.

Heading further downhill into more thoroughly wet areas we saw the expected species such as Oblong-leaved Sundew *Drosera intermedia*, and Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor*, but the flowers of Marsh St John's wort *Hypericum elodes* remained resolutely shut. The Brown and White Beak-sedges *Rhyncospora fusca* and *R. alba* were plentiful and, like Bulbous Rush *Juncus bulbosus*, made very attractive shadows criss-crossing the water.

The rain stopped before midday, so we only had the water beneath us to contend with. Reaching the path near the footbridge we found a small amount of Coral-necklace *Illecebrum verticillatum,* and a similarly modest area of Hampshire Purslane *Ludwigia palustris*. The wellington-booted members ventured right into the bog and were rewarded with a nice population of Pillwort *Pilularia globulifera*. This species was enough to tempt the rest of us into trying to step from tussock to tussock, and we saw that it is definitely a plant worth getting wet feet for with its diminutive, coiled fronds. We also saw a very handsome Raft spider.

Over the footbridge, our leader veered into woodland beside the stream and found a small Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis*, although several of us, after a quick look, obeyed the call, "It's Sharon o'clock!" (12pm) and headed up towards Rowbarrow to find a seat for lunch, thus missing larger specimens.

The first Oak *Quercus robur* we encountered is something of a miracle: a large area of its trunk was missing, and even more bark, yet somehow it is managing to stay alive and erect. There were some magnificent trees, many of them with very attractive lichens, including impressive curtains of *Usnea* species. Our lunch spot was a recumbent oak – not dead, just resting. The woodland provided the added interest of fungi, with several kinds of *Russula*, a lovely young specimen of Beefsteak Fungus *Fistulina hepatica* and, later, in a different area, Chicken of the Woods *Laetiporus sulphureus*.

After lunch we found our way to Bishop's Dyke and as we left the wooded area an unmistakable aroma alerted us to the close-cropped lawn of the Chamomile *Chamaemelum nobile* we were walking on. We paused at a wet area where Kat Newbert triumphed once again, finding Lesser Marshwort *Helosciadium inundatum*; another new plant for several of us. We headed downhill once again into the valley mire, where we saw larger populations of Hampshire Purslane and some nice patches of Allseed *Radiola linoides*. I will gloss over the wettest moments of this part of our walk, which, after a climb up past heather and gorse, was explained by a sign (facing away from us and the first we had seen) advising that there was no longer a circular walk as bridges had been removed and replaced with fords 'to help water flow across the wetlands'. We can attest to the scheme's success.
By this time, the sun was out, and we had boardwalk underfoot as we viewed welcome repeats of previous species, plus a few additions, notably a Bladderwort *Utricularia intermedia agg*. As a finale to the day, our expert hunters found another small population of Marsh Gentians, this time with their unbelievably blue flowers fully open in the sunshine.

Fran Sinclair

Heliosciadum inundatum © Pat Woodruffe

Radiola linoides © Fran Sinclair

Gentianella inundatum © Pat Woodruffe

Illecebrum verticillatum © Karen Andrews

Extra photos to enjoy.

Dactylorhiza fuchsii & Onobrychis vicifolia © F.Sinclair

Pilularia globulifera © Fran Sinclair

Orchis mascula © Richard Aisbitt

'That tree' at Pigbush © Fran Sinclair

Karen enjoying the rain

Fran at odds with the swamp, Pigbush © Karen Andrews

Kat takes botany to new depths © Karen Andrews

(Please accept my apologies if I have mistakenly inserted the wrong copyright name however, they are secure. Any photographs not so addressed are from the Editor's collection.)

….and finally

On behalf of the Committee, may I ask that if any of you have outstanding plant records, large or small, from this or previous years to send to Richard Aisbitt as soon as possible please. The 31st of December 2024 concludes 25 years of botanical search, and we wish to have as complete a conclusion as possible.

Further work will be conducted in 2025 to search for those rare or scarce plants, or those of local interest that have been missed in the standard search.

Message from Fran

This year's New Year Plant Hunt will be held on Sunday 29th of December at Marlborough.
Car parking arrangements are to follow.
If you have not attended before then the object of the task is to seek out as many flowering plants or grasses that may be in flower as possible (You know that saying that saying; 'You don't have to be mad to work [botanise] here but it helps.)

Next issue

Following Dave Green's earlier success discovering two new species of Sorbus in Herefordshire; *Sorbus greenii* Green's Whitebeam in 2009 and *Sorbus herefordensis* Herefordshire Whitebeam in 2010 he has found another Sorbus new to science. All to be explained next year….

There will also be the usual list of species new to 10-kilometre OS map squares across Wiltshire.

Lastly there will be the programme of field meetings arranged by Fran Sinclair.

Cirsium dissectum © Fran Sinclair