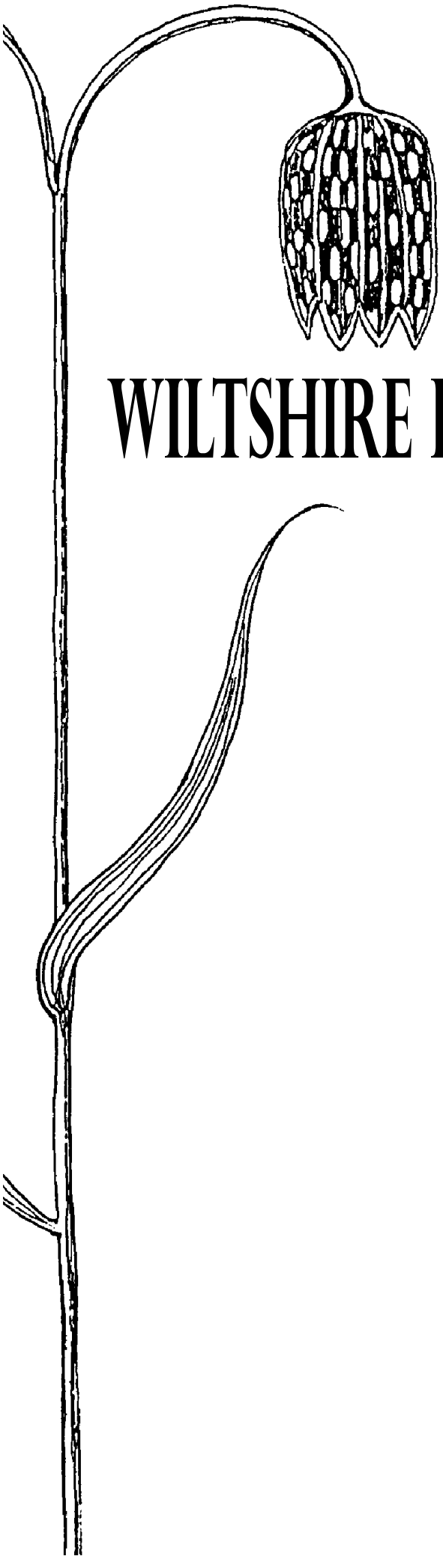
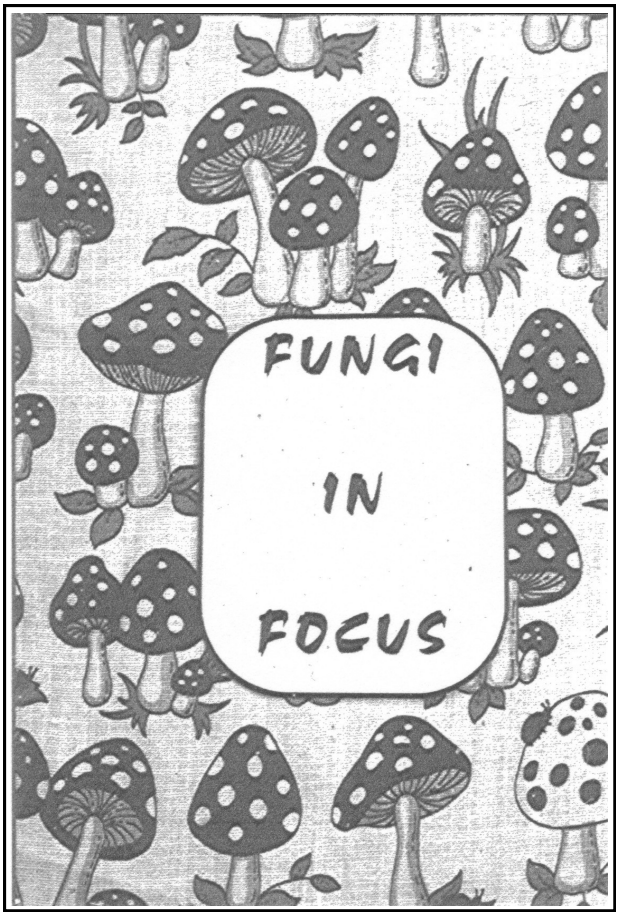


NEWSLETTER

Issue 23 Winter 2003-4

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

In this issue:



Saturday October 4th 2003

John Presland – an illustrated talk

John's superb slides of flowering plants are well known, but we didn't all know of his fungal specialism. His slides and knowledge have not been recently acquired – there was on slide taken before he had flash – 34 years ago.

Fungi are apparently virtually impossible to classify, but this did not detract from the beauty of the slides, including some almost microscopic ones. Fungi are in separate kingdoms (at least three) from plants and animals – the slime moulds, the true 'toadstools', and cellulose-walled fungi (e.g. damping-off fungus). The term 'Toadstool' derives from the German *Todes Stuhl* meaning 'seat of death'!

John reckons the best way to understand toadstools is to put them in groups with similar morphology, so the slides were arranged like that. Important features to look for include the 'veil' (universal or partial), whether or not there is a sheath on the 'stipe' (stem), and whether there are scales (remains of a veil) on top of the stool. Obviously the colour is vital, also the shape of the gills/pores. The spore colour can be ascertained by leaving the stool (minus stipe) on a piece of paper, and covering with polythene to obtain a 'spore print'.

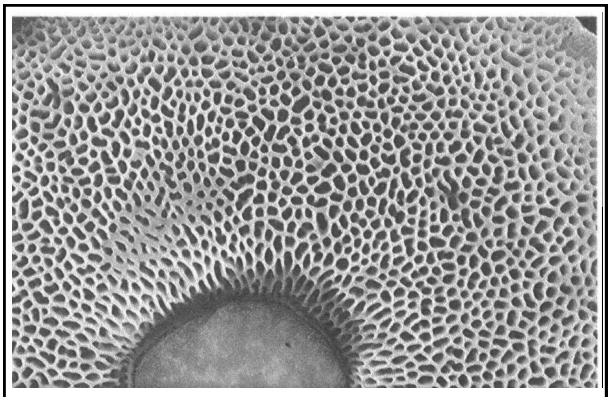
Some well-known fungi were discussed – eg Honey Fungus which is both parasitic and saprophytic and whose rhizomorphs ('roots') can spread over 30 feet. I was not, apparently, committing a crime collecting 'Magic Mushrooms' (*Psilocybe semilanceata*) with my teenage son; I would have been only if I had eaten them in any *altered* state – as would my consciousness have been!

Simon Young

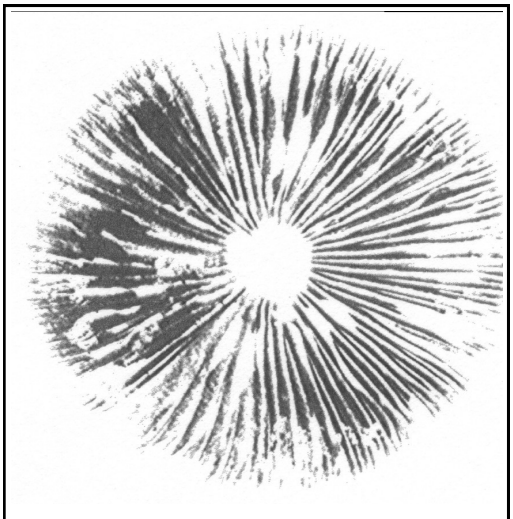
****

Two stages of development of fruit body of *Amanita pantherina* (Panther Cap) showing scales on the cap and ring on the stipe

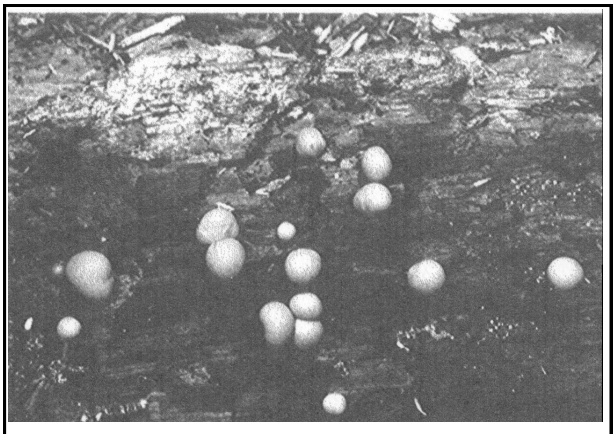
Cluster of fruit bodies of *Armillaria mellea* (Honey Fungus) at foot of a tree it has killed at Westonbirt



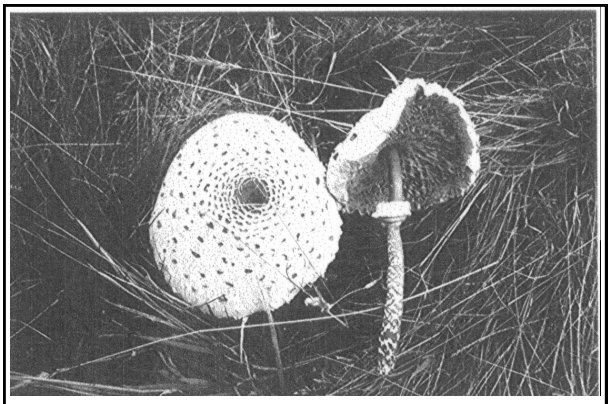
Pores of *Xerocomus chrysenteron* (Red-cracking Bolete) on underside of cap



Spore print of *Psathyrella lacrymabunda* (Weeping Widow)



Fruit bodies of *Lycogala terrestre* (a slime mould)



Fruitbodies of *Macrolepiota* procera (Parasol Mushroom) showing scales on cap, and ring and snakeskin markings on stipe

October 12th, Savernake Forest

Fungus Foray

Peter Marren and Malcolm Storey

As always Peter & Malcolm gave our group of twelve a fascinating morning - they were a brilliant double act.

The conditions were the driest for many years, but Peter told us we should find 50 species; this sounded like wishful thinking, but he was proved right - the find total was 60. Several were new to the forest and one a real rarity.

From the parking place at the picnic site we walked barely ½ mile in 3½ hrs, showing that Savernake is one of the prime sites for fungi in Wiltshire.

We first headed for the enormous tree trunks lying on the ground, and stumps of those that had fallen or been felled. The common *Meripilus giganteus* (Giant Polypore) and *Daedaleopsis confragosa* (Blushing Bracket) were abundant; these would not be so dependent on the rain, having their own supply of moisture. *Oudemansiella mucida* (Porcelain Fungus) is well named – it is pure white and shiny, and grows on beech. This was common, as was the dreaded *Armillaria mellea* (Honey Fungus) in its various guises.

We did find quite a variety growing on the forest floor, although in smaller numbers than usual; there was a rather unusual bolete, *Boletus pruinatus*, with a red-brown cap and red and yellow stem.

There were numerous *Scleroderma* (Earth Balls) and *Lycoperdon* (Puff Balls) and *Paxillus involutus* (Brown Roll-rim) was fairly abundant.

The rarity was *Psathyrella pyrotricha*, closely related to *Lacrymaria velutina* (Weeping Widow) but a gorgeous bright orange.

A very informative and enjoyable morning and we are grateful to Peter and Malcolm.

Joy Newton

Saturday November 22nd

The Road to the Desert - a Journey across Morocco into the Sahara

Talk by Monica Blake on 22.11.03

Monica's talk on Morocco, illustrated with her lovely slides, attracted a good audience and those present weren't disappointed.

She explained how eight friends had booked a fly drive holiday to Morocco from a travel company, with two cars, mainly as a bird watching trip. Most of the trip was along the plains of the Anti Atlas where there were fields full of yellow Statice.

They started from Agadin and drove through the marsh and swampland south of there where they spent some time watching birds and also saw Moroccan Orange Tip and Monarch butterflies. Flowers seen on the marsh included Fringed Water Lily, Blue Star Thistle, *Anthemis chia* and *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*.

A night was spent at a stone campsite at Sidi Tifni on the coast beyond the estuary of the Massa, having seen turtles in a small lake at Massa. At the campsite Monica saw a wonderful night sky packed full of stars. The warden told her that it was possible to see the top of the Southern Cross from the cliff top. He said it is the only place in the world where you can see the North Star and Southern Cross in the same sky. If this is so, then Sidi Tifni should be on the 'must see' list of every enthusiastic astronomer.

The valleys and gorges of Todra and Dades were visited where they saw a type of purple Larkspur, Yellow Lupin, Field Rose and *Lantana* sp.

It was then into the desert where the majority of the party camped at a place on the edge of the desert, but Monica and her friend chose to sleep on the flat roof of the café, which was OK but it got extremely cold in the night. The journey further into the desert

was carried out on the backs of dromedaries. Species seen in the desert included *Rumex* sp., a purple and white *Limonium*, Woad, a long straight line of Sand Convolvulus and a beautiful Skink. Monica later found out that the Convolvulus was growing along a place where there was a buried pipeline. This caused condensation to form on the sand at night and provided a microclimate for the Convolvulus to grow in. On the edge of the desert *Tradescantia purpurea* and *Hibiscus auratum* were noted.

Monica showed a slide illustrating how many of the buildings in Morocco are constructed. It showed a wall built with straw, sand and brown clay on the outside. This is baked in the hot sun to form a firm structure. This particular wall had an exotic looking White Crowned Black Wheatear sitting on it. Amongst the many birds seen in the desert were six other species of Wheatear and five species of Eagle, although Monica didn't have slides of these for obvious reasons.

The group then crossed over the High Atlas, passing Mount Maroc, to Marrakesh and then the lovely harbour town of Essouria. Cultivated flowers seen in Essouria included *Tecoma allemande*, *Holmskioldia sanguinea*, *Caesalpina pulcherrima* and *Gazania* sp. Butterflies included Tiger Blue, the southern form of Speckled Wood, Moroccan Large White, Scarce Swallowtail and Two-tailed Pasha.

Monica pointed out that she couldn't find a flora of Morocco so definite identifications sometimes proved tricky.

The talk was both informative and enjoyable. I had heard stories of Morocco for many years and recommend a visit after hearing this talk. I shall certainly try to go there sometime in the future.

The afternoon ended with a much-needed cup of tea.

Jean Wall

Saturday I7 January 2004

Cultivating Native Species for the Horticultural Trade

Talk by Andy Byfield

Andy described how he had spent ten years in Turkey as part of a small team setting up, and subsequently managing, the Indigenous Propagation Project of Threatened Bulbs. He was working on behalf of Fauna and Flora International, along with a Turk by the name of Sema Atay for the Turkish Society for the Protection of Nature. He began by giving us a quick tour of Turkey, dividing the country into three main areas: the south, with a typically Mediterranean climate and flora; the Anatolian plateau in the centre, much of it over 1000m, with hot summers and very cold winters; and the north, bordering on the Black Sea, with a much higher rainfall and an "English-type" climate. Turkey has a very extensive flora, numbering some 10,000 species of vascular plants, and we were treated to some choice examples from each of the three areas.

He then went on to describe the background to the Indigenous Propagation Project. For decades, local villagers had been persuaded to dig up vast quantities of bulbous plants by one of four exporting firms. The plants were then dried and sent to Holland where they were grown on for a year, and then re-exported under the pretence that they were of Dutch origin. Not only did this seriously deplete certain areas of Turkey of the plants concerned, but, because of the difficulty of distinguishing between closely similar species, a number of decidedly rare plants were being inadvertently dug up along with the commoner ones. As an example, *Cyclamen mirabile,* which is a rare species, was being dug up and sold as the very common *Cyclamen hederifolium*. The aim of the project was to replace this wholesale removal of wild plants with the sustainable farming of chosen bulbous species which, in the first instance, were provided to those villagers who agreed to participate in the

What are these and where are they from?

scheme. After an abortive attempt in northern Turkey, the village of Dumluguze in the south was selected for a pilot scheme, and in the first year seven villagers were persuaded to grow a crop of snowdrops. They had to grow them on for three years before harvesting, to allow them to produce a good number of daughter bulbs, and for this they were paid at a rate that gave them a substantially better reward than under the previous practice. The project rapidly grew in popularity, until after ten years 360 families spread over three villages were growing bulbs. They really entered into the spirit of things, and the end of each season was marked by a lavish party. In addition to two species of snowdrop, *Galanthus elwesii* and *G. woronowii,* other plants being grown under the scheme are *Anemone blanda*, three species of cyclamen, *Eranthis hyemalis*, *Fritillaria imperialis*, Fritillaria *persica*, *Leucojum aestivum* and *Sternbergia lutea*. As a result of this project, the export of wild-dug snowdrops has decreased from 40 million a year to 8 million a year.

Andy concluded his talk with a brief mention of Plantlife, the wild plant charity that he now works for. Plantlife recently relocated to Salisbury. They manage a number of reserves, and are hoping to establish a new one in Kent in an area where, among other species, there is a wild population of the rare Corncockle. Ongoing projects include a national juniper survey and an arable plant survey. The latter was clearly of interest to the audience, judging by the number of survey forms that were taken away.

Jeremy Wood

Saturday 21st February 2004

Conservation Of Protected Species And Habitats Across The Defence Estate

Oliver Howells

Olly Howells is one of a team of conservationists employed by Defence Estates to advise on management of their land – some 3600 sites representing 1% of UK land area. This is a job in marked contrast to his previous role as warden of Bentley Wood. Olly is based at Westdown Camp and his work is confined to southwest Britain, but it still involves much travelling to sites in Cornwall and West Wales, as well as to more local ones.

At a UK level, the sites cover the full range of habitats and offer many opportunities, not least because some of them, such as [1]SPTA , are very large. Much of The Estate is afforded some degree of protection; 60% is designated [2]SSSI, 50% either [3]SAC or [4]SPA and some 30% lies within a National Park. Despite this, the needs of the MOD must always come first and therefore compromises between military training and conservation management are often sought. The process is effective, with 60% of SSSIs in a favourable condition and the aim of raising this to 95% by 2010, but the difficulties of grazing or scrub control within an impact area are not readily resolved.

Olly showed slides and talked about several issues of interest to us as botanists: grazing regimes for waxcaps, the problems of scrub encroachment and conservation of *Rumex rupestris* at Penhale, Wilson's Filmy Fern in woodland at Sennybridge and a single patch of *Linnaea borealis* in Corsican pine at RAF Kinloss. He also touched upon the conservation of Choughs, Nightjars and Red Kites. The progress of the latter were monitored by soldiers practicing their observational skills.

Turning to Salisbury Plain, we learnt that the area covers around one ninth of the County and is the only place where a whole brigade can exercise together at one time. Acquisition of this vast area began in 1897 and it now represents a third of the UK calcareous grassland. There are 42 tenant farmers and each farm has a management plan which gives guidance over issues such as stocking rates, use of overwintering feeds, use of fertilisers, times of mowing and ploughing consents. A recent project, known as the herdsman project, has involved replicating ancient nomadic grazing patterns in an attempt to improve the structure of grasslands.

Those who bemoan the damage done by tanks will be pleased to learn that 4% bare ground is the threshold value and that the actual amount is probably less at the current time. In fact, this might be insufficient to sustain some of the annuals which depend upon disturbance for their very existence.

Olly completed a fascinating talk by telling us that weekly meetings were required to finalise training programmes and that factors such as weather conditions and soil moisture were considered before consents were given. It is so easy to be critical and so difficult to manage the needs of all concerned. What would have been the fate of Salisbury Plain under different ownership?

Pat Woodruffe

Abbreviations

[1] SPTA: Salisbury Plain Training Area

[2] SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest

[3] SAC: Special Area of Conservation

[4] SPA: Special Protection Area

Saturday, 27th March, 2004

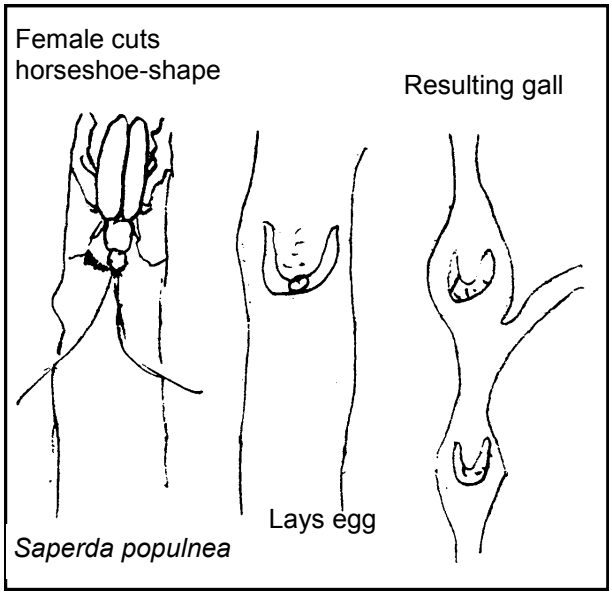
Beetles and Plants: Their Interdependence

Michael Darby: an illustrated talk

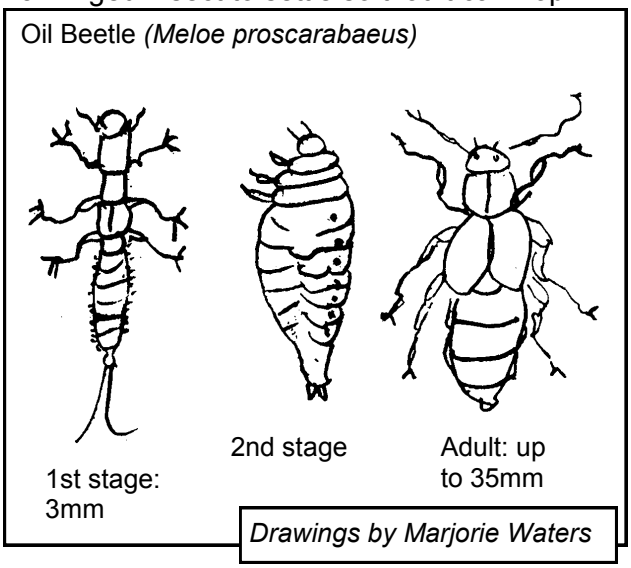
The first book of note on beetles and plants was Donavan's in 1792. Linnaeus had already named some of the beetles. Donovan's book was more artistic than scientifically correct. Then Stevens and Curtis wonderfully noted 3,000 species. Although beautifully illustrated the flowers and beetles shown together had no relevance to each other.

Plant eating beetles are most common and knowing the plant the beetle is eating is often a good aid to identification. This works both ways, as Figwort and Buddleia are now known to be genetically close as *Cionus scrophulariae* was seen to eat both. Thus some beetles eat only one type of plant and others are less particular.

Beetles use plants for a variety of reasons. The Great Diving Beetle *(Dytiscus marginalis)* lays its eggs into the tissue of water plants. Some use plants for shelter and others lay their eggs on to the plant as food for the larvae. Adult and larvae may eat the same plant, as with the Lily and Asparagus Beetles. Many beetles can be of pest proportions, such as wireworm - larvae of the Click Beetle. The Pea Weevil larva eats the nitrogen fixing nodules of the plant whilst the adult eats the leaves. The reviled Vine Weevil eats the leaves of your cherished plants as its legless offspring devours the roots. Some beetles live on pollen having specially adapted combed legs or hairy bodies to collect the pollen (Bee Beetle). Many plants are pollinated by beetles and angiospermae have evolved to protect the seed from being eaten whilst offering pollen to visitors. Beetles laying eggs in tissue may cause galls as in *Saperda populnea* where the larvae must eat prodigiously or be squashed by its host.



A most dysfunctional parent is the Oil Beetle *(Meloe proscarabaeus).* She lays thousands of eggs into the soil. The tiny larvae hatch and their interest in botany begins. They must climb up the nearest stem. Only the fortunate one to find a flower at the top of the stem is in "luck". 3mm long, it now waits for a winged insect to settle so that it can hop aboard. However, only those lucky enough to encounter the solitary bee, *Andrena,* have any hope. Now back to the cell containing *Andrena's* egg; our intrepid larvae must land on the egg or drown. If lucky it will float about on the egg devouring it. Its next larval stage can to swim and so its life gets a bit less chancy. Several moults later it pupates and eventually emerges as a Beetle. You may meet one on Middleton Down. The female is very large, black and almost wingless.



Wood eating beetle larvae take years to emerge and cause a large exit hole to appear in your clogs overnight.

Some insects, for instance bugs (*Hemiptera*) are mistaken for beetles. These differ from beetles in having as their life stages: egg, nymph, (instar stages like small adults) and adult. They have fewer segments in their antennae.

As Barbara pointed out, earwigs care for their young before and after hatching. Michael stated that some beetles also have parenting skills. However, this was another story, reluctantly we left the fascinating world of the beetle and a beautifully presented talk.

Marjorie Waters

Dick Last

Sadly, Dick died in July. Our best wishes go to Barbara, who has lost a wonderful companion. I'm sure that many of us who knew this delightful man will appreciate this poem written by Ron Hurst.

Dick and Barbara Last (*photo: Sally Moyes*)

A Tribute to Dick

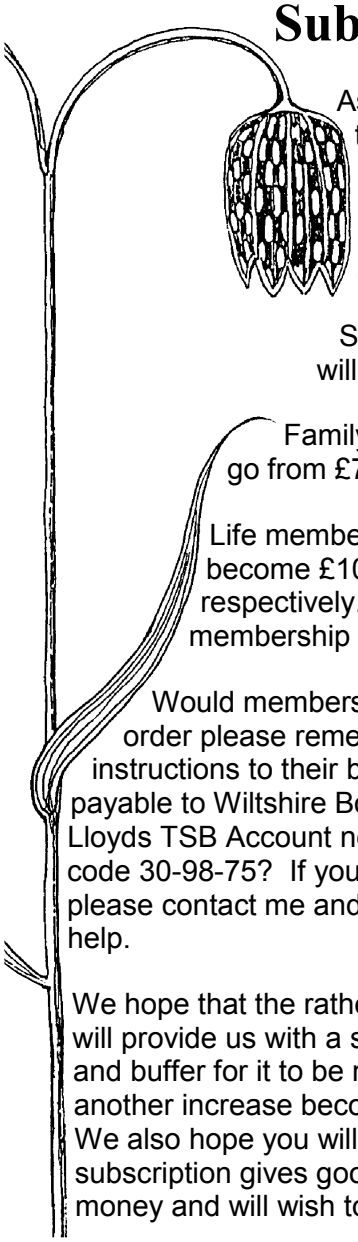
I knew a man who loved this life,
Who spoke of birds and trees and flowers,
I see him now, upon the Plain, on breezy days,
With towering clouds 'gainst azure skies.

I didn't know him really well,
We met on countless country walks,
On tracks which crossed lush pattered fields,
In search of adder's tongue or filmier fern.

This casual bystander in crumpled hat,
This kindly man with kindly ways,
Who knew so much, yet said so little,
Was always there to reassure,
To guide those less imbued with country lore,
He stayed behind lest someone strayed,
Enjoined the stragglers in knowing talk,
Belied his silent, smiling diffidence.

He has not died, this friend of ours,
His smile, his friendly nod,
His many kind and thoughtful ways,
Remembered by us all.

Subscriptions



As those attending the Annual General Meeting will know, subscriptions will increase from January 1st 2005.

Single membership will go from £5 to £10

Family membership will go from £7.50 to £15

Life membership will thus become £100 and £150 respectively. Existing life membership will not be affected.

Would members paying by standing order please remember to give new instructions to their banks – new rate payable to Wiltshire Botanical Society via Lloyds TSB Account no. 3185653 sort code 30-98-75? If you have a query, please contact me and I will do my best to help.

We hope that the rather steep increase will provide us with a sufficient income and buffer for it to be many years before another increase becomes necessary. We also hope you will still feel the new subscription gives good value for your money and will wish to stay with us.

For members wishing to resign from the Society at any time or for whatever reason, it would be most helpful if you could let either Rosemary Duckett or myself know.

Gwyneth Yerrington (Hon. Treasurer)

If you haven't as yet paid this year's subs, please let me have it now!

PLANTLIFE

Be a Volunteer

Plantlife International is looking for volunteers to help out at their offices in Salisbury. The work will involve composing letters and emails, data entry, research, mapping and some general administrative support. If you can put aside at least a half-day each week, are computer literate, familiar with Windows - and some or all of - Microsoft Outlook, Word, Excel and Internet Explorer, with experience of map reading, scientific names and floras, then please contact Katie Price on 01722 342735 or at katie.price@plantlife.org.uk for more information or an informal chat.

Katie Price

For more information about Plantlife, visit their website at www.plantlife.org.uk

Call for records from our BSBI County Recorder

Now that summer is well and truly here, and hopefully many of you will be getting out and about into our beautiful county, I'd like to encourage you to send me your records for both VC7 (north Wilts) and VC8 (south Wilts) . I enter all records into a MapMate database, which I will download to the BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles) central records database on an annual basis.

I am particularly keen to encourage new records for species that are notable in some way, particularly those known to be nationally rare or scarce (found in 1-15 and 16-100 of the 10 km OS grid squares in the British Isles respectively). Even species that are relatively frequent in Wiltshire can fall into these categories, for example Loddon Pondweed *Potamogeton nodosus* is abundant in parts of the River Avon in VC8, but is listed in the British Red Data Book. Other characteristic species of our area: Chalk Milkwort *Polygala calcarea,* Dwarf Sedge *Carex humilis* and Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* for example, are nationally scarce.

Records for hybrids, casuals, established aliens and other native species that are relatively uncommon would also be most welcome. Into this large and rather woolly latter category I would place such species as Deadly Nightshade *Atropa belladonna*, Ploughman's-spikenard *Inula conyzae*, Field Gromwell *Lithospermum arvense* and other declining arable 'weeds' and so on.

I will happily accept records in the form of (legible) handwritten notes, letters, emails or telephone calls as well as MapMate or Excel files but would request the following information as a minimum:

- Location given as a six-figure OS grid reference;
- Name of site e.g. 'Kennet & Avon Canal, Bradford on Avon'
- Date of find;
- Finder (and determiner if relevant)
- Number of plants counted or estimated.

If you can also supply habitat details e.g. 'rank grassy verge' or 'in chalk stream' that would also be helpful.

Many thanks, and happy botanising 2004!

Sharon Pilkington
BSBI Recorder for VCs 7 and 8
5 Gainsborough Rise
Trowbridge
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BA14 9HX

Home tel 01225 775945

Email sharon.pilkington@npaconsult.co.uk

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Membership

We welcome new members, beginners and experts alike. If you would like to join, please complete the slip and send it to:

Gwyneth Yerrington
28 Meadowfield
Bradford on Avon
Wilts BA15 1PL

Subscriptions (new rates):
Ordinary Member---------- £10.00 per year
Joint Membership---------- £15.00 per year
Life Membership ---------- £100
(Family £150)

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Richard Aisbitt

Future meetings

Please suggest ideas for meetings or talks. Contact me by writing to:

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or by phone or e-mail (01794 884436, pmw@bentleywood.fsnet.co.uk)

Pat Woodruffe