

NEWSLETTER

Issue 24

Summer 2004

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

In this issue:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Home Covert Garden..... | 2 |
| Arable Plants at Whelpley Farm. | 3 |
| Middleton and Chickengrove | 3 |
| Visit to Kent | 4 |
| The Blean..... | 4 |
| Wye National Nature Reserve | 5 |
| Bonsai Bank and Park Gate | 6 |
| Pegwell Bay | 8 |
| Sandwich Bay | 9 |
| Samphire Hoe | 10 |
| Folkestone Heights | 11 |
| Dungeness..... | 13 |
| The University site..... | 14 |
| Porton Down..... | 15 |
| Shapwick Fen | 15 |
| River Plants at Malmesbury | 16 |
| Henry Edmonds' Organic Farm | 18 |
| Arable weed recording | 18 |
| Visits: Two Reminders..... | 19 |

Home Covert Garden, Roundway, Devizes

Wednesday, April 21, 2004

Eight members turned up to see this wonderful garden in the pouring rain. The garden is 34 acres, mostly on greensand. A small part of it is formal, with a large lawn which slopes to a wooded valley with a fast-running stream and a waterfall. Shrubs, trees and bamboos from every part of the world clothe the valley.

Our tour was led by the owners, John and Sarah Phillips who started the garden in 1960 and who have an intimate knowledge of their plants. They answered our many questions with great patience.

They first led us through drifts of yellow and white Erythroniums, amongst them a spectacular group of *Trillium chloropetalum*. Looking amongst the Erythroniums, we were shown patches of the Mouse Plant, *Arisarum probosideum*, a native of Europe. Below their leaves we found many flowers, their curious spathes extending into long tails.

We then turned our attention to the trees. Standing on its own was an elegant specimen of *Betula jermyns* with its white trunk and extra long catkins – up to 17cm. Other birches which caught our eye were the beautiful round-headed *Betula davurica* in the middle of the lawn, and, in the Magnolia walk, *B. albo-sinensis* var. *septentrionalis* with its beautiful pinkish bark. We stopped to look at the interesting *Pinus aristata*, Bristlecone Pine, with short leaves in fives, flecked with white resin. There are examples in its native south-west USA which are 2000 years old. Some of the other conifers we looked at were: *Picea breweriana*, Brewers Weeping Spruce, *Pinus wallichiana*, Bhutan Pine and *Juniperus recurva* var. *coxii*, all three gracefully weeping or drooping.

The tree that dominated the valley was the magnificent, large *Magnolia x veitchii* in full flower. We stopped to look at *Illicium anisatum*, a relative of the magnolia family, with many-petalled cream flowers, and took a sniff at the aromatic leaves.

In the valley there was an interesting collection of bamboos, among them *Sinarundinaria nitida*, arching over the waterfall and *Chimonobambusa tumidissinoda*, a rare and delicate bamboo which came from Jeremy Wood's garden. On the valley bottom were large isolated patches of the vivid purple *Lathraea clandestina* a parasite whose host puzzled us.

Amongst the trees, rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias and Prunus gave bright splashes of colour. We stopped to admire the huge blooms of *Rhododendron basilicum* and examined the winged leaf petioles, an unusual feature in rhododendrons.

Great interest was shown in the huge drifts of *Cardamine bulbifera*, an uncommon native in central and southern England, but spreading in this garden. John said he thought the bulbils here could even move upwards!

Having walked us round the garden, for nearly three hours to our surprise, John and Sarah invited our dripping party to very welcome tea and scones, completing what had been a marvellous and informative afternoon.

Maureen Ponting

13 May 2004

Arable Plants at Whelpley Farm.

A small group of eight met on a warm mid May morning to survey the arable weeds with Simon Smart the FWA Officer. The farmers have agreed to leave wide headlands around certain fields and it is these areas that we targeted. In some cases the headlands had been left unploughed and in others they had been cultivated but not sown. Although the crops had been sprayed the headlands had not, but some drifting of spray on to their margins had occurred in places. Since this is the first year of the project, our aim was to provide a baseline for later comparison. It is anticipated that next year more interesting plants will appear, as tillage of the headlands will take place again. If this is not the case, then they will be grassed over.



photo: Pat Woodruffe
Papaver hybridum, Rough Poppy

Clearly, one visit is not sufficient to obtain the full picture but what we found was encouraging and provided evidence of a substantial seed bank. Simon Smart is looking for volunteers to carry out these surveys over the next few years and is willing to pay travelling expenses to those who would like to participate. Further details of the project and his contact number can be found in the last newsletter – issue 22 summer 2003.

Pat Woodruffe

Sunday 23rd May 2004

Middleton Down and Chickengrove Bottom

We started the walk from the Ox Drove near the southern end of Middleton Down reserve and walked along Rats Castle Bottom and Gorse Down. It was good to see a new member among the group today.

Among the many chalk downland species seen were early purple and Common Spotted Orchids, Kidney Vetch, Common and Chalk Milkworts and Dwarf Sedge. The gorse on Gorse Down indicates acid conditions, probably due to the cap of clay where the bushes are found. We found Tormentil and Heath Speedwell here as well, plants which also prefer acid soils.

Middleton Down is a lovely reserve and no matter how many times I visit there is always something exciting to see, and this day was no exception finding an Oil Beetle, *Meloe proscarabaeus*. Barbara explained to us that the female lays thousands of eggs and that the beetle is parasitic on the bee, *Andrena cineraria*.

On the return journey we walked at the top of the down through the top soil scrape area. The turf was removed 12 years ago from this flat area, previously altered by fertilisers and sprays, in the hope that Stone Curlews would nest here. However they never did but now the chalk grassland flora is regenerating and we were lucky enough to find three plants of Early Gentian, another exciting find. Also on the scraped part were Mignonette, Rock-rose and Field Pansy.

Butterflies seen were Grizzled and Dingy Skippers and Common Blue.

The day was warm and sunny and by mid-day we were all in need of refreshment so it was off down the road to Chickengrove Bottom reserve to find shade beneath the trees for those who wanted it and to eat lunch. Barbara found a Common Carpet Moth waiting to welcome us by the gate of the reserve.

Chickengrove Bottom is a mixture of grassland with impressive anthills and woodland. Among species seen were Greater Butterfly Orchid, Hairy St. John's Wort, Twayblade, Betony, Zigzag Clover, *Brachypodium sylvaticum* and *Brachypodium pinnatum*. It was good to be able to compare these last two species growing quite near to each other. Just on the edge of the woodland was a lovely colourful patch of Wild Garlic, Bugle, Herb Robert, Yellow Archangel and Wood Melick.

Butterflies seen at Chickengrove were Speckled Wood and Green Hairstreak.

Jean Wall

6th to 10th June 2004

Visit to Kent

This year, Pat Woodruffe arranged accommodation for us at the University of Kent in Canterbury. We shared a number of student houses and as the weather was glorious, it was tempting to sit outside in the warm evenings. Fortunately the University shop had an excellent stock of wine. Was it really fourteen empties lined up in our kitchen? We had sinking feelings when a group of German students moved in opposite and started discoing outside, but we needn't have worried. They were charming and considerate and were more in danger of being disturbed by rowdy botanists.

The campus area is next to a sizeable wood its buildings are spread thinly amongst a scattering of trees and bushes. This provided morning walks for early risers. On our return, we could eat breakfast while watching the rabbits play and then prepare gourmet picnics for the day ahead.

Thanks to Monica Blake and Marjorie Waters, who know this part of the world and had reconnoitred the sites before our visit. They had also arranged expert guides for a varied programme of morning and afternoon visits. The habitats included ancient woodland, rich downland, seashore and reclaimed land. Is it possible to see too many orchids? It would be difficult when there was such a variety of spectacular and rare types. Now we are familiar with Late Spider Orchids, will we find Wiltshire has more than we thought?

What delights wait for us in Oxfordshire in 2005?

Richard Aisbitt

Sunday June 6th

The Blean

Our first visit of the trip was to the area known as the Blean which lies between Canterbury and the coast at Herne Bay and Whitstable. It contains over 11 square miles of woodland, home to many rare species including the Heath Fritillary Butterfly and nightingales. Much of it designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. We met up at East Blean National Nature Reserve

Much of the reserve is coppiced and contains



hazel oak birch and hornbeam, as well as a scattering of Wild Service Trees, some coppiced and some suckering. We also found Alder Buckthorn, Goat Willow and Eared Willow, the latter identified by the tiny "ears" below the leaves. Sweet Chestnut, which was originally introduced to provide hop poles, is now being gradually removed, as it supports few insects or birds. Coppicing of other species continues, in spite of the lack of a market for the product, in order to provide open areas. Much of the coppiced timber was stacked around the boundaries to form a barrier and provide a habitat for insects.

Almost as soon as we entered the reserve we found the Heath Fritillary Butterfly, together with several of its caterpillars feeding on Common Cow-wheat, difficult to photograph in the sombre light. This area of Kent is one of the few sites in the UK where it is still to be found. Honeysuckle looped around the trees and as we walked the rides there were common plants of damp acid woodland all around - Ling, Raspberry, Tormentil, Heath Speedwell, Hoary Cress, Lesser Spearwort and two woodrushes, *Luzula sylvatica* and *L. multiflora*. As far as I know, no-one was lucky enough to see or hear a nightingale.

More spectacular flowers and brighter weather were yet to come on the following days, but this was a very pleasant start to our sojourn in Kent and was an interesting contrast to the more alkaline habitats familiar in Wiltshire.

Gillian King

Monday June 7 2004, a.m.

Wye National Nature Reserve

The first full day of our visit to Kent started at Wye National Nature Reserve. Our leader Dave Maylam, who is English Nature's site manager, has more than thirty years' experience of the site and he was able to tell us a great deal about it's management and the fortunes of the twenty or more species of orchid which are recorded there.



Columbine

We were delighted to see a few Lady Orchids and quite a number of Man Orchids as well as the rare Black-veined moth, the natural food-plant of which is thought to be Tor-grass. On a different part of the reserve we were shown a colony of Late Spider Orchids, each plant enclosed in a sturdy mesh cage to prevent browsing by deer. We were able to remove them for close inspection and photography. The plants are recorded meticulously using the triangulation technique and some seed has been collected for the Millennium seed bank. Germination tests have shown that the seed is sterile unless hand pollinated. It appears that the population of the pollinator, which is possibly a brown-tailed bee, is far too low to be effective.



Another Black-veined Moth - photo: Pat



Black-veined Moth - photo: Pat Woodruffe

As well as open downland, some of the steep slopes of Wye NNR are covered in woodland, with significant amounts of sweet chestnut and ash, but entomological records indicate that previously the area had supported gorse, heathers and juniper. Our only disappointment on this lovely reserve was that the Wasp Orchid was not in flower this year. In fact, it has only flowered three times in the past 26 years; in 1978, 1990 and 2003. It seems that we might have quite a long wait for the next occasion. Perhaps we should plan another visit in 2015?

Pat Woodruffe

Monday June 7 2004, afternoon

Bonsai Bank and Park Gate

Having spent the morning at Wye we went on to Park Gate Down, a Kent Wildlife Trust chalk grassland Nature Reserve. Ian Rickards of the Trust was there to show us the Reserve. The Orchids at Wye had been wonderful but the Monkey Orchids at Park Gate were not to be outdone. In 1999 Monica and I had seen about a dozen Monkey Orchids in wire cages but now they were in profusion and had spread to other areas



Late Spider Orchid - photo: Pat Woodruffe



Leslie Wallington: one lady homes in on another



Lesley's quarry: Lady Orchid



Fly Orchid

of the reserve. Other orchids we found were Bee, Fly, Fragrant, Frog and Butterfly. We couldn't find Late Spider or Musk Orchid this time. Wild Columbine was in flower on the bank and a profusion of other flora and fauna to keep us busy and happy for hours.

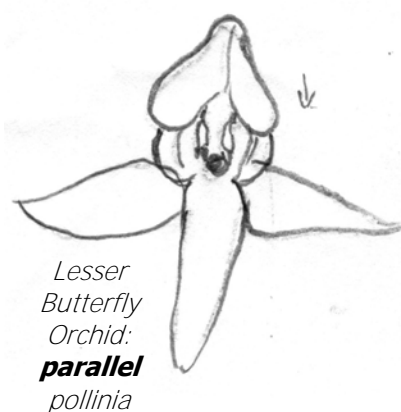
Time was speeding on and we learned that the reserve was managed by winter grazing with Highland Cattle and Exmoor ponies. This sounds like a good photo waiting to be taken. Some compartments are summer grazed if the grass gets too rank.

Ian kindly took us on to Bonsai Bank Reserve saving us a long walk through Denge Wood. The walk to Bonsai Bank is worthwhile but we were beginning to feel that it had been a long day. Bonsai Bank was well worth the effort as the Lady Orchids were quite spectacular. Many other Orchids too, and a site for Duke of Burgundy Butterfly. We could have spent a day in this wonderful Reserve. It is leased from the Forestry Commission and managed by hand cutting with a brush cutter with a little help from some enthusiastic Feral Goats and Soay sheep. The trees on the Reserve were said to grow short and stunted, hence it's rather romantic name. Now we thanked Ian and set off for Canterbury feeling as tired and happy as any Pilgrim.

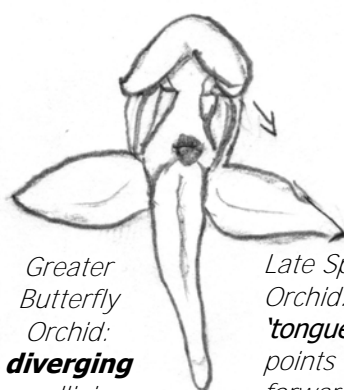
Marjorie Waters



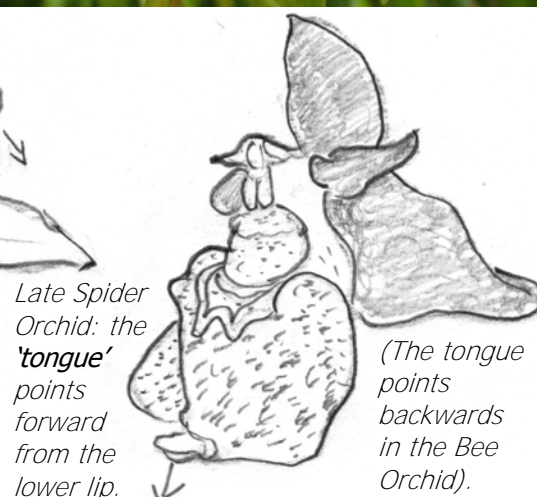
Man Orchid



*Lesser
Butterfly
Orchid:
parallel
pollinia*



*Greater
Butterfly
Orchid:
diverging
pollinia*



*Late Spider
Orchid: the
'tongue'
points
forward
from the
lower lip.*

*(The tongue
points
backwards
in the Bee
Orchid).*

Diagrams by Marjorie Waters

Tuesday 8th June 2004, morning

Pegwell Bay

This was a day unique in all our lifetimes as there was a Transit of Venus. Richard devised a contraption for us to see it safely using his binoculars and an empty cornflakes packet. It was only a black dot on an orange disc, but it was thrilling to see it, and to think of Captain Cook sailing to Tahiti for a previous Transit in 1769.

Our morning's botanising at Pegwell Bay needed less imagination for us to be thrilled. Close to the car park there was a puzzling *Euphorbia* but we did not pause long as we went on down a mown path between long grass dotted with Alexanders, small apple trees, Elder, Alder, *Rosa micrantha* and an unusual mustard, *Hirschfeldia incana*. A handsome purple-stemmed lettuce, *Lactuca virosa* was worth stopping for but soon we were greeting large numbers of Grass Vetchling, *Lathyrus nissolia*, in full flower with their pretty carmine faces dotted in the grass.

Suddenly, there were Lizard Orchids. Wow. What startling, unlikely spikes for temperate old England with their mauve-brown pennant lips twirling in the breeze. Of course we paused a long time there, and close by there was a big clump of the puzzling *Euphorbia* so some happy consultations went on until it was nailed as *E. uralensis*, Twiggy *Euphorbia*.

The area was also infested with Bee Orchids, a huge population, but most atypical as they were in long



grass three or four times their own height. We all saw the Lizard orchids though not all at once as it was a morning when we drifted about in small groups of changing composition; we potted and peered, came across each other, swapped news, ambled on. I was with a group that ventured a little way onto the salt marsh. There was *Scirpus maritimus*, a good show of Greater Sea-spurrey, (*Spergularia media*) Sea Purslane and *Salicornia* sp. Perennial Wall-rocket (*Diploaxis tenuifolia*) grew on the sea wall and there were brilliant patches of Stonecrop in suitably impoverished and baking spots.

We were soon hot also as it was a ferociously hot bright day by our standards and we were drifting back to base to lie on cool grass in the deep shade of a *Sorbus* sp., where we ate our lunch. Later, some people had a contented little session with small trifoliate, *Trifolium scabrum* and *Medicago minima* among others, while Audrey's car alarm went berserk.

This report is of only a small corner of what went on. With so many of us, often separated, on such a gloriously rich site, words fail. AND there was the afternoon to come.

Rosemary Duckett

Tuesday 8th June 2004, afternoon

Sandwich Bay

The reserve consists of beach and foreshore with a hinterland of old dunes and some saltmarsh and lies on a bird migration route hence we started our afternoon at the Bird Observatory.

A most hospitable place staffed by a friendly and knowledgeable group of people who provided us with welcoming smiles and hot tea.

Chloë Pritchard, Conservation Officer, led us onto the Sandwich Bay estate into an area of ancient sand dunes with some familiar plants, Germander Speedwell, Ragged Robin, Common Vetch and the very beautiful scrumptious fat purple Southern Marsh Orchids. Some lovely yellows - Yellow Rattle, Yellow Bartsia (this one looks familiar but isn't) Fleabane (not yet yellow), Greater Birds-foot Trefoil, Prickly Lettuce, Hop Trefoil, Silverweed, Celery-Leaved Buttercup and Honeysuckle.

Then onto the Golf Course we spent a happy time examining tiny tares; forget counting leaflet pairs; try pods downy (Hairy Tare), pods hairless (Smooth Tare). If there are no pods come back another day! The celebrity of this area was of course large, lush languid Lizard Orchids, carefully camouflaged in the grasses and sedges; Cat's Tail, Squirrel's Tail, Brown and Sand Sedges, and Sharp Flowered Rush. Two or three Man Orchids wearing the same hats (close cupped petal and sepals) as the Lizard Orchids were there too. Dots of stunning pink Grass Vetchling caught the eye growing with sparkling white Oxeye Daisies and closed up for the afternoon, Goatsbeard.

Nearer to the sea another rarity the Clove Scented Broomrape, elegant creamy stems, large wide awake white flowers and two black anthers like alert eyes, most unlike the usual sleepy, secret look of broomrapes, and yes it did smell cloveish. A small colony of the very small, clear pink Sand Catchfly,



Pat Woodruffe's turn for the Lizard Orchids



hilarious through the camera lens as the calyx is so long – catching flies?

Onto the crunchy pebbles of the beach with very handsome sea kale, modest Sea Sandwort and then, for some of the party, a ride to Little Gully by minibus to see Twayblade, Adder's Tongue Fern and Dune Willow. The rest of us walked back to the Observatory where Chloë showed us some of the species caught in the moth trap the night before notably Privet Hawk, and Large and Small Elephant Hawk moths.

Note: the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory is so well worth a visit, the staff welcome visiting groups as well as passing visitors. Courses are available there and overnight accommodation is only £8 a night. There is a well-stocked shop with excellent books, clothing and binoculars: everything for the naturalist. ☎ 01304 617341

Lesley Wallington



Wednesday June 9th, a.m.

Samphire Hoe

Samphire Hoe, on the coast between Dover and Folkestone, was created from the material removed during the making of the channel tunnel. Starting in 1987, seven million cubic metres of chalk marl, a soft grey rock, were dug out, and the problem was where to put it. Nearly five million cubic metres were spread on the English side of the channel and surrounded by a high sea wall to make Samphire Hoe, while the rest went to France. During construction of the tunnel the area was known as 'Lower Shakespeare Cliff Site'. In



1994 a competition was organised to find a more appropriate name. From the hundreds of entries received the judges chose 'Samphire Hoe'. A hoe is a piece of land sticking out into the sea, while Rock Samphire grows on the site and is mentioned by Shakespeare in his play 'King Lear'. The plant used to be collected from the cliffs, pickled in salt water and used as a salad.

After the chalk marl was in place, wildflower seeds were sown over half the area using five different seed mixes to suit specific parts of the site. The other half was sown with rye grass; this largely died out, to leave bare areas that were colonised by seeds from the surrounding countryside. Both halves now support a wealth of plant life.

One of the commonest species that we saw on leaving the car park, and indeed in the car park area itself, was Sainfoin, which takes its name from the French 'foin sain', meaning 'healthy hay'. This was accompanied by Restharrow, Kidney Vetch, Horseshoe Vetch, Nottingham Catchfly, Yellow-wort, Viper's-bugloss and Red Valerian to name but a few. Less conspicuous species included Dittander and Wild Madder, while in places a low shrub turned out to be Sea Buckthorn. In one area where the soil was particularly impoverished Early Spider Orchids were at least twice as tall as in their more familiar habitats, such as the Dorset coast.

At the western extremity of the hoe, at the base of the cliff, both Rock Samphire and Golden Samphire were seen growing close together. These two plants are of course quite unrelated, the former being an Umbellifer and the latter a Composite (or family Asteraceae to use modern terminology). On the shingle just beyond the sea wall two typical species were Sea Kale and Yellow Horned-poppy. Butterflies seen on the walk included Adonis Blue; Linnets were flying around one of the shallow ponds, and a Peregrine Falcon was briefly seen winging its way high up above the cliff top. After a two-mile circular walk in the sun the tea kiosk back at the car park provided welcome refreshment.

Jeremy Wood

Wednesday 9th June 2004

Folkestone Heights

The hot and sunny weather continued into the afternoon and for many in the group it will be unforgettable.

After a leisurely picnic lunch at Samphire Hoe we met Paul Hadaway, Project Officer for the White Cliffs Countryside Project. WCCP is a partnership between Dover and Shepway district councils, Kent County Council, Eurotunnel, English Nature, The Countryside Agency, Kent Wildlife Trust and Folkestone and Dover Water Services. Several large sites of national and international importance for landscape and wildlife are managed by WCCP and Paul spent his afternoon showing us a tiny fraction in the area of Folkestone Heights. We parked on Crete Road at TR212381, and spent a good half hour paying homage to yet more rich chalk turf, this time a fairly recently created patch covering Hill Reservoir. Normally horse grazed, a local dispute left the paddock horseless for a few months so the sward was a treat. The species list is another from this holiday dominated by orchids; Man, Fragrant, Pyramidal, Common Twayblade and lots of Bee. Without Rita that would have been it. We would have enjoyed the Fairy Flax, Kidney Vetch, Quaking Grass, Yellow-wort, Upright Brome and left. Rita, however, actually looked at some of the Bee orchids. Inspired by discussions earlier in the holiday about the shape of the lip, close examination of an odd-looking Bee orchid produced a Late Spider, likely to be a first record for



The curiosity: very pale Bee Orchids - Ophrys apifera var. chlorantha



Curious botanists with an unusual orchid

this site.

Another treat at this tiny reserve was a couple of Small Blue butterflies. The very pale underside contrasts with the brown top surface to give it a distinctive scintillating appearance in flight. With its size this looks like one of the few Blues I might be able to identify on the wing. Adonis Blues were also around and a Cuckoo called. Conjecture over the horse heightened as we left. Richard found part of the missing animal: a complete leather collar and lead rope with a very frayed end!

A short walk got us to our next site, Castle Hill. This is an extensive hill top earthwork built nearly 900 years ago. As we walked along the footpath the Channel Tunnel entrance with its extensive fencing, sidings and building complexes were arrayed below us covering the valley floor. This was a fascinating sight, if rather lacking in activity and was made more evocative by the close proximity of Crete Road. Crete Road is an ancient route which may have led to France before the land bridge was breached by rising sea levels.

Castle Hill was grazed and in consequence was a very different experience. We believed Paul's description of the hillside being yellow with cowslips earlier in the year as low leaf rosettes were everywhere. Pictures show Early Purple orchids flowering along side. A stout plant of Weld sprung from the bottom of a dip and Gromwell was found. Flowers of Common Rock-rose

added a little colour and someone mentioned Horseshoe Vetch. Dingy Skipper was seen.

We continued eastward from Castle Hill and descended a little to join a path known locally as the tank track. Paul recounted the tale of this track's creation during the WW2. The sea port at Folkestone with Lydinge Aerodrome close behind was considered a likely landing place for a German invasion. There is a twist to this tale. The officer in command was later found to be a German spy.

We were on this path to see white Bee orchids of which four plants were duly found. Its flower was devoid of red pigmentation but had the familiar lip markings in a dull creamy yellow. Adonis Blues were frequent, an early Scabious was just coming into flower and Fragrant orchids were seen but, despite best efforts, no more Late Spiders.

Christine Storey



Low-maintenance verges - photo: Pat Woodruffe

June 10th

Dungeness

The weather was unkind on our last day, torrential rain was interspersed with bright sun. We parked at the Light Railway Café from which the beach was easily accessible. The Old Lighthouse unfortunately was only open at weekends. The good side was the wonderful display of brilliant colours of the shingle flora so close

to the car park, Red and White Valerian and blue Viper's Bugloss. Some of us made for the shingle beach. The old storm ridges were evident but there were no lichens on the shingle near the sea. This is a result of the continuous movement of loaded lorries passing shingle back from Dungeness Point to protect the power station to the west. But as we moved back inland we found huge plants of Sea Kale (*Crambe maritima*), Horned-poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) and Sea-pea (*Lathyrus japonicus*) in abundance. Then a greater variety of flora was evident, Nottingham Catchfly (*Silene*

nutans) formed creamy drifts in between Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) which was frequently covered in Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*). In the slight dips there were some lichens, mostly *Cladonia* spp and mosses. This flora produces a more humus-rich soil and a greater variety of cover. The Sea Kale and Horned-poppy decreased and grasses, Hedge Bedstraw (*Galium mollugo*) and many others filled the space.

Sadly the weather deteriorated and we had to abandon the survey and make for home. As a bonus we passed the house and garden of the late poet David Jarman



Yellow-horned Poppy and Sea Kale on Dungeness Beach

who had lived on the road near the shingle ridges. Both house and garden are open to visitors. We were able to walk round and admire his use of local flora and also his artistic talent with driftwood, circles of stone and twisted wire shapes using flotsam and local litter. The whole effect was brilliant.

In spite of the weather the visit to this unique site at Dungeness was very interesting, and the colourful road verges were outstanding.

Audrey Summers

And another note ...

Have you ever had trouble with those grasses?

"We had a lovely afternoon at the Dungeness RSPB reserve area though didn't stray more than 20m from the car. Burr Chervil, *Anthriscus caucalis* was there in profusion under the shrubs and the odd bits of grassy sward in the car park had Sea Storksbill, *Erodium maritimum* - very distinctive if rather small. Back home, we had a good look at a piece of grass from the cafe car park and what we were calling *Lagurus ovatus* turned out to be *Cynosurus echinatus*. Felt embarrassed about that until we owned up to Pat who said she had decided it was a *Polypogon*!"

The University site

The University was intended to be just our residential accommodation and studying its flora was not one of our objectives. However, it would have repaid more than the incidental observation we gave it.

In the car park by the shop were a number of plants which must have been Creeping Yellow Cress (*Rorippa sylvestris*) despite their uncharacteristically neat appearance. They were in or near planted beds and could have been cultivated, but seem more likely to have been weeds. Some of the inflorescences were galled, providing a home for midge larvae. Lesser Swine-cress (*Coronopus didymus*) was undoubtedly a weed. The most exciting (botanically) find was the rare Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*), growing just beside the front door of one of the houses in which we were staying.

On walks further afield a number of interesting habitats were found. Tall roadside vegetation included Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) and a variety of other plants of unimproved tall grassland. There was a pond containing abundant Reedmace (*Typha latifolia*) and Yellow Flag (*Iris pseudacorus*). Woods and copses abounded. Beneath some birch trees was a striking fungus with whitish patches on a brown cap, probably *Amanita excelsa* (otherwise known as *Amanita spissa* var. *excelsa*), a relative of the Fly Agaric and Death Cap.

John Presland

Sunday June 20th 2004

Porton Down

Leader: Stuart Corbett (Porton Down Conservation Officer)

After a brief introduction in the impressive Conservation Centre Stuart took fourteen of us first to Battery Hill where, after skirting the wood, we walked down a West-facing slope that had been cleared of scrub three years ago and on to an area of fairly dense scrub through which rides had been cleared only last winter. Already a good selection of plants were re-colonizing both areas; in particular we noted both Common and Chalk Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris* & *calcareae*) - which some of us learned for the first time to distinguish between! - Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*), Knapweed Broomrape (*Orobanchae elatior*) and Long-stalked Cranesbill (*Geranium columbinum*). The diminutive size of some of the plants was noticeable, due perhaps to the impoverishment of the soil and/or the dry weather we had been having.

We were delighted too to find that the Lesser Centaury (*Centaureum pulchellum*) which we had seen on the edge of the wood on our visit in 2002 was still thriving.

After our lunch break we drove to Isle of Wight Hill/ Wood (so named as it is alleged that in favourable conditions one can see the Isle of Wight from there) just over the Hampshire border. Here among other things we saw both Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) and Green-flowered Helleborine (*Epipactis phyllanthos*), a number of Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*), a Bird's-nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*), Mid a good stand of Cypress Spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*). As a bonus a beautiful Dark-green Fritillary kindly posed for the photographers!

Altogether it was a most enjoyable and rewarding day thanks to the expert guidance of Stuart and his colleague, Ailsa McKee.

Tony Dale

29th June 2004

Shapwick Fen National Nature Reserve, near Glastonbury

Melvyn from English Nature felt lucky leading us around Shapwick Fen, as his boss preferred the paperwork. We were lucky too; his enthusiasm for the Fen and knowledge of its history and management were inspiring.

The Sweet Track is a Neolithic, 6000 year old raised track way 2km long. It was built of wood which was preserved by the anaerobic conditions of the wet peat, which built up over the years. The track was used to cross the wet fen lands – then from Roman times peat was cut by hand for fuel; this continued until the 1950's when mechanisation took over and the use of peat in horticulture meant it was extracted until the 1990's. There is now a restoration programme to restore the reed beds and to provide the right habitat for otters and waterfowl; the water table is controlled by electric pumps, funded by the EU. Of course by improving the habitat for otters the whole chain of plants and animals benefit. There are at least two family groups of otters and water voles are increasing.

Our walk began with the Sweet Track and continued in a circular tour, taking in a bird hide from which we had a spectacular view of a hunting hobby

Greater Tussock sedge (*Carex paniculata*) was abundant, as was the Great Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*) and Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and a good area of the Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*). There were several patches of Milk Thistle (*Peucedanum palustre*) which we thought was only in East Anglia – but no Swallowtail butterflies yet! Melvyn had planted many Alder Buckthorns (*Frangula alnus*) for their role as insect hosts.

Damselflies included Common Blue, Blue-Tail and Red-eyed. The Scarlet Tiger moth was truly spectacular and doing very well in the Fen.

As a final treat before lunch our leader found Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*) on a path.

We then had our picnic on a pile of logs by the Peat Centre, where schoolchildren were enjoying a 'Neolithic' morning.

After lunch we visited some great hay meadows, where the water table was about 6 inches below the surface. It was good to see Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) and Common Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum flavum*) but the real excitement of the afternoon was the insects. The experience was incredible; every step we took sent moths,

grasshoppers and bush crickets into the air. The beetles, bugs and spiders were also in vast numbers. The star of this 'insect paradise' was the Great Green Bush Cricket; several of these beautiful creatures showed themselves off.

All this made the visit truly memorable; we had been told about the management and experienced the stunning results.

A sedge found in the wet hay meadow has been confirmed as *Carex rostrata* (Bottle Sedge) - quite uncommon and not recorded there before; we have it in Wiltshire at Jones' Mill.

A small black caterpillar feeding on *Iris pseudacorus* leaves and taking great holes out of them has been identified as the larva of the Iris sawfly - *Rhadinoceraea micans*

Joy Newton

Sunday 11th July 2004

River Plants at Malmesbury

Leaders: Jean Wall and Jack Oliver

Eleven of us drove through heavy rain, but this had fortunately ceased by the time we assembled, conveniently close to the River Avon on the outskirts of Malmesbury for a somewhat chilly start.

The river at this point is slow flowing and overhung with trees, but clear enough to see several fish, including a small pike. Before we studied the plant life in it however, we examined the various specimens that Jack had 'prepared earlier'. The differences in the upper and lower stems of a Water Starwort, *Callitriche obtusangula* were noted, the parallel sides of the lower leaves being clearly visible. We also had a sample of Willow Moss, *Fontinalis antipyretica*, so called for its past use as packing in the walls of wooden houses as a protection against fire.

Growing in the Avon we could clearly see the difference between the submerged and floating leaves of the Yellow Water Lily, *Nuphar lutea*, and the submerged and erect stems of the Common Club-rush or Bulrush, *Scirpus lacustris*. The tiny plantlets of Duckweeds, *Lemna minor* and *Lemna minuta*, together with the Water Fern, *Azolla filiculoides*, floated on the water surface. The river bank supported Purple-loosestrife, Hemlock, Water Figwort, False Fox-sedge and a single plant of Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*), the lower stem leaves with their large oval end lobes clinching the identification. Jean pointed out to us a single plant of the uncommon Wood Club-rush, *Scirpus sylvaticus*, growing at the foot of the riverbank. Although somewhat weather-beaten, this was a most attractive, statuesque plant.

We continued by crossing the road to a meadow, enjoying the sight of a swan and five cygnets resting under the bridge. Unfortunately the field had recently been well grazed by cows and we were faced with a lot of stalks, but we still managed to find much of interest. Water Chickweed, *Myosoton aquaticum*, Medium-flowered Winter-cress, *Barbarea intermedia*, Redshank, *Polygonum Persicaria* and Water Pepper, *P. hydropiper* were found. Jack sampled a small portion of the latter to see if it were as hot and peppery as the books say. It was!

None of the Bur-reeds growing along the river were in flower, but Jean said the Unbranched, *Sparganium emersum*, was the most common, although there were a few of the Branched, *S. erectum*, present. With the aid of a splendid pole bearing a hook we were able to pull out a submerged leaf and examine the rectangular structure of the cells under a lens.

Water Forget-me-not, *Myosotis scorpioides*, and Water

Speedwell, *Veronica anagallis-aquatica*, grew at the water's edge, whilst the pole came into use again to retrieve a piece of pondweed, *Elodea nuttallii*, for closer viewing – more delicate than Canadian Pondweed.

A walk across rutted fields and over awkward stiles brought us back to the riverbank to see a rare plant seen in the area previously by Grose. This was the River Water-dropwort, *Oenanthe fluviatilis*. Richard bravely descended the bank to reach a portion with the aid of the useful pole and flung it to us over his head. The botanists abandoned him to gather round, lenses at the ready, until sternly reprimanded by Lesley and told to come and assist the ascent back up the bank before Richard was forced to swim. After the rescue and thorough examination of the specimen, it was returned to the river.

At this point the weather was warming up and butterflies rising from the grass. We gradually drifted back. There were many other plants, too numerous to mention, and it was a lovely visit, very interesting and beautiful. Thank you Jean and Jack.

Gwyneth Yerrington



Richard goes fishing: photo Pat Woodruffe

Wednesday July 21st

Henry Edmonds' Organic Farm, Cholderton

Leader Audrey Summers

Fifteen members and two guests nearly overwhelmed Audrey, who had to organise us into two teams to record the 'burial' wood and the field adjacent to it.

I am not aware of particular wood findings, but, as with much of the farm, there was a rather strange mix, including arable plants in the glades! The field had an abundance of *Odontites vernus* (Red Bartsia) and *Orobanche minor* (Common Broomrape), with several plants like *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury) and *Cirsium eriophorum* (Woolly Thistle) occurring as isolated plants or small groups. We guessed there had been some artificial seeding going on!

In the afternoon we drove and walked to the best arable field margin, where Joy's eagle eye spotted a *Papaver argemone* (Prickly Poppy) seed-head and *Galeopsis angustifolia* (Red Hemp-nettle) – the latter a new finding for this incredible strip. Both Corncockle (one plant) and Cornflower were in evidence – generally agreed to have been artificially introduced.

Returning to the cars by a different route we found a lot of *Legousia hybrida* (Venus's-looking-glass) – not seen in the best strip. By visiting this wonderful place, we had some insight into the state of arable farms before the Second World War!

Simon Young

17 August 2004

Arable weed recording, Downton area

Over a dozen of us, including Simon Smart of FWAG, met at Wick Farm, but were forced to shelter from torrential rain in a tractor shed for some minutes. We then drove along wet, muddy tracks to the part of the farm we were to survey. We split into several small groups in order to cover as many fields as possible, and from now on the rain held off and the sun shone for much of the time.

Yew Tree Bottom, the field that my group surveyed, was quite productive. One of our best finds was *Fumaria densiflora*, Jeremy kindly pointing out its dome-shaped fruit and long sepals. Also new to me was *Euphorbia platyphyllos* (Broad-leaved spurge) with its warty-looking capsules. These two interesting species also turned up in other fields. We were delighted to see *Papaver hybridum*, (Rough poppy), its near crimson petals contrasting with the scarlet of the common *Papaver rhoeas*, of which there were many. A few plants of *Kickxia spuria* (Round-leaved Fluellen) were found, but none of its sharp-leaved relative. *Chaenorhinum minus* (Small toadflax) turned up in some quantity, along with *Euphorbia exigua* (Dwarf spurge), *Veronica polita* (Grey speedwell) and many more common species.

The farm seemed to be good for bird life too, with bullfinches heard along the lane, and goldfinches perching on overhead wires. Whitethroats were heard calling in the hedges surrounding a nearby field and the air above the farmyard was full of swallows and martins.

After lunch, some of the party moved on to Botley's Farm to continue recording.

Here we split again in order to record all four margins of five fields as efficiently as possible. Generally speaking, we found the farm less rich than the one surveyed in the morning but several of the more interesting species were there, albeit in small quantity.

The day provided ample demonstration that the seed bank of arable plants is still alive and waiting to be kick started. Farmers are increasingly interested in their conservation and recognize the value of headlands. It is frighteningly clear that the efficiency of modern herbicides is such that few if any arable plants can survive in the treated areas. Hopefully this Wiltshire FWAG effort, in which many of our members have expressed interest, will set an example to those in other counties too.

Mary Kidd and Pat Woodruffe

Visits: Two Reminders

Please tell Pat Woodruffe (contact details on back page) if you want to go on either of these visits. So far, not enough people have booked up to make either visit viable.

Visit to Kew Gardens, Saturday 16th April 2005

Please let Pat know by November 26th 2004 if you would like to be included (see meetings programme Winter 2004-5).

Residential Visit to Oxfordshire, Friday July 8th to Sunday July 10th

Please contact Pat as soon as you can. You will need to send a £15 deposit. There was a booking form included with Newsletter 23. Here is some of the information given:

"The sites to be visited are as yet unconfirmed but the overall plan is to meet mid-morning on Friday 8th at the first site. Ideally this will be to the SW of the city. We shall then have two full days visiting reserves before departing late afternoon on Sunday. A day in the Chilterns, to include the well-known Warburg Reserve, is being planned as well as one to parts of Otmoor."

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE

| | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Barbara Last | Chairman | 01722 790368 | Blast@berwick40.fsnet.co.uk |
| Rosemary Duckett | Secretary | 01373 858296 | rduckett50a@amserve.net |
| Gwyneth Yerrington | Treasurer | 01225 862740 | |
| Joy Newton | | 01672 540356 | cnewton@freeuk.com |
| Paul Darby | Wilts Wildlife Trust | 01380 725670 | pdarby@wiltshirewildlife.org |
| Louisa Kilgallen | Minutes Secretary | 01225 867331 | louisa.kilgallen@virgin.net |
| John Presland | Editor/Wiltshire Botany | 01225 865125 | johnpresland@tiscali.co.uk |
| Richard Aisbitt | Newsletter, Plant Records | 01793 694680 | richardaisbitt@yahoo.co.uk |
| Sharon Pilkington | County Plant Recorder | 01225 835227 | sharon.pilkington@npaconsult.co.uk |
| Jack Oliver | | 01672 861251 | |
| Pat Woodruffe | Meetings Secretary | 01794 884436 | pmw@bentleywood.fsnet.co.uk |
| Dave Green | | 01225 835227 | info@conscons.com |
| Lesley Wallington | | 01225 709560 | lesley@wallington.fsife.co.uk |

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)

Wiltshire Botanical Society

Name:

(Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss/Dr)

Address

.....

.....

Postcode

Telephone number

Please make cheques payable to "Wiltshire Botanical Society"

From the Editor

Please send material to:

84 Goddard Avenue
Swindon
Wilts SN1 4HT
or
richard@aisbittr.freemove.co.uk

Richard Aisbitt

Future meetings

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

Anchorsholme
Hop Gardens
Whiteparish
Nr. Salisbury
Wilts SP5 2ST

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

Pat Woodruffe