

NEWSLETTER

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WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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Wiltshire Botanical Society Excursions, 2005

This year, we have branched out into less familiar groups: lichens and bryophytes, with fungi following very soon. We also had a trip to see the wonders of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, followed up later by our own Wiltshire mini-Kews: exotics and natives in Ron Hurst's garden and Simon Young's specialist plant nursery.

Our few days staying in Oxford and visiting Oxfordshire sites were the highlight of the year. We had to admit that the vast meadows at Chimney and at Otmoor, where we had special access to the army ranges, were as fine as anything in Wiltshire. Although Oxfordshire has little downland, the limestone slopes of the Chilterns were wonderful. We thank Camilla Lambrick and other Oxfordshire experts for being so welcoming and helpful.

We visited a variety of special sites in Wiltshire, sometimes with the help of **two** county plant recorders (our own Sharon Pilkington and also Ken Adams from Essex).

Many thanks to Pat Woodruffe, whose programme of meetings seems to get better every year, to the hosts and guides who have led the visiting parties and to the authors whose accounts and photos are published here.

Richard Aisbitt



Wednesday 16 March 2005

Lichens in Great Ridge Wood

Leaders: Joy Ricketts and Lesley Balfe

Much expertise is needed even to start to get to grip on the three specialities of fungi, bryophytes and lichens. We have been fortunate in the Wiltshire Botanical Society to have generous help from specialists. From October 2004 to March 2005, Malcolm Storey and Peter Marren, Sharon Pilkington and Jacqueline Wright and on this occasion Joy Ricketts and Lesley Balfe, gave lucid, patient and enjoyable expositions.

There were fifteen attenders and we saw between 25 and 30 lichen species. Four of these lichens had been subject each to one (or more!) recent switches of genus let alone all the alternative species designations. Discrimination could be visual alone, or helped by spot chemical colour changes using chemicals such as bleach or potassium hydroxide. One lichen, *Phlyctis argena*, underwent three colour alterations with potassium hydroxide in reverse spectral sequence: first to yellow, then to orange, and then red.

Notable finds included *Usnea florida* as an indicator of old woods, and *Hypocenomyce scalaris*. To me, the most interesting comments by Joy were on the common but beautiful orange lichen *Xanthoria parietina*. The orange pigment parietin acts as an anti-UV light screen. In the shade, *Xanthoria* turns green as the parietin fades. Joy also drew attention to the lichenicolous fungus *Xanthoriicola physciae* parasitizing *Xanthoria*.

Evernia (used in ancient Egyptian mummification) is distinguished from *Ramalina* by the distinct colour difference between the top and under surfaces; but this feature of discrimination is weakened or lost when *Evernia* fragments become detached and blown along the ground. Another field observation was the strong tendency of numbers of trees to be silvery-grey on one side with lichens, but green on the other with mosses and liverworts.

Some *Cladonia* species have the ability to concentrate heavy metals, including radioactive ones. Others feed on inorganic phosphates. They are now well known and used as pollution indicators. Joy touched on the ancient lichen symbiotic origins – perhaps 20% of fungi 'learned' (evolved) to hold living algae, and approximately 20 algal species are utilised by the fungi.

Our thanks go to Joy and Lesley for this instructive and interesting Morning.

Jack Oliver

Tuesday 5 April 2005

North Meadow and Barnsley Warren

On a somewhat cold, grey and blustery morning in early April, several of us gathered for a morning walk round North Meadow with Gemma the reserve's temporary warden from English Nature. It was not a day for standing still so we set off at a fairly brisk pace to find some snake's head fritillary.

We were soon to be accompanied by Anita the voluntary warden and Mr "Hay Ward" of the Court Leet, both from Cricklade. A brief history of the meadow and management was given, one interesting fact is that there are now no local farms bordering the meadow so no cattle are grazed during the grazing period from 12 August to 12 February and horses have replaced the cattle with a maximum of 30 allowed. This last winter has been relatively dry and so the meadow has not been extensively flooded, which it had been for the past several years. The fritillaries like to be flooded every year: it seems to encourage them to flourish and flower. At this early time of April the tall spikes with their long thin leaves were not numerous and only just coming into flower. Nevertheless there were some for us to admire with their lovely purple checkerboard flower heads bobbing in the light breeze. Interestingly enough there were also quite a number of the creamy white flowers. An early April look at the fritillary gave us a chance to see the incredible "snake's head" markings of the flower head as it begins to open out.

Except for the tall fritillaries, a few clumps of yellow march marigolds just starting to flower and a couple of clumps of cuckoo flower, everything else was at ground level so looking at basal leaves was the order of the day. Joy had rushed off to keep warm but then shouted to draw our attention to a few leaves of adder's tongue fern she had spotted. Amongst other plants spotted by their leaves were purple saxifrage, great burnet, hemlock water dropwort, pepper saxifrage and two or three inches showing of giant horsetails and some yellow rattle. After a good traipse in North Meadow we moved over to Gloucestershire for a visit to Barnsley Warren reserve on the Foss Way north of Cirencester, to see the Pasque flowers. We followed a big HGV at 40 MPH for miles...only to find it turn into our lay-by and block it! Following a welcome lunch break Pat led us over to the reserve which is a steep Cotswold slope on a side of a narrow dry valley and is unimproved grassland. The oolitic limestone here forms a sharp break of slope where the indurated top of the White Limestone gives way upwards to the fissile Forest Marble limestones. The rocks have a thin covering of soil and so support a large number of grassland plants. After a short walk and with eyes down, the first Pasque flowers were found on this south-facing slope, just a few centimetres from the ground looking up at us. Once we had our eyes in, there they were with their lovely purple bell-shaped flower heads

with yellow middles and soft hairy leaves. They are simply delightful flowers. Once again few other plants were flowering on the day but the leaves of the parasitic bastard toadflax were found. This plant hosts an interesting shield bug, the *Sehirus dubius*, a small bright looking insect which Malcolm found when not doing photography. Halfway along the reserve, the Pasque flower regime switched to Early Purple Orchids! Their leaves were only just showing with their early flower buds.

During the day we were accompanied by skylarks singing their hearts out, a single swallow flew over North Meadow, possibly the first of the summer to be seen this year. We also were treated to sightings of military aeroplanes from local airbases. A super purple and yellow field day.

Judy Gosnell:

Saturday 16 April 2005

Kew Gardens

'Fled are the frosts, and now the fields appear,
Reclothed in fresh and verdant diaper;
Thaw'd are the snows; and now the lusty spring
Gives to each mead a neat enamelling'

Robert Herrick - Welcome Spring

Twenty members travelled east to witness the unfurling of spring at Kew. As we all have different experiences of the gardens each visitor will have their own memories of the visit. This is my list.

The quote was inscribed at the entrance to the magnificent Princess of Wales Conservatory. This is the most recent glasshouse, opened by Diana, Princess of Wales in 1987 and commemorates Princess Augusta who married Frederick, Prince of Wales in 1736 and who founded the gardens. There are ten different environments covering the whole range of conditions in the tropics from scorching arid desert to moist tropical rainforest.

I was immediately drawn to the Titan arum, *Amorphophallus titanum*. This was tantalisingly close to flowering as the spathe was two metres long. In the past this event has drawn large crowds but apparently visitors never stay long due to its truly disgusting odour. If you can stand the smell it would be worth



The Titan Arum and admirers

seeing as the flower is 3m in circumference green mottled with cream on the outside and rich crimson inside, surrounding the central spadix. The odour is due to sulphur containing compounds that attract the pollinators, carrion feeding insects. After flowering the inflorescence dies back and is replaced by a single leaf which can be 6m tall. The leaf produces sugars which are stored in the corm as starch and once the corm has reached the necessary size of over 70kg the flower is produced again.

But is it not just monster plants that make the conservatory such a fascinating place. I travelled 3 continents as I admired an intricate climber with a raceme of red and yellow "slippers" *Thunbergia mysorensis* from India, the air roots of red mangroves *Rhizophora mangle* from Florida, and the brilliant *Brillantasia nyanzarum* from Africa.

Some plants were protected from thieves. The display of orchids demonstrated the diversity of this fascinating group with various species of *Disa* from South Africa, *Epidendrum* from America, and the curiously striped yellow and brown slipper orchid from Borneo *Paphiopedilum rothschildianum* contrasting with the smaller but more familiar *Ophrys tenthredinifera* from Mediterranean Europe. The insectivorous area showed our native sundew *Drosera* with many stately *Sarracenia sp.* from America. Their protection is necessary because they are much sought after for flower arrangers, resulting in severe depletion of the wild population.

I checked the growth of the giant water lilies. The Victorians would marvel at the giant Amazonian water lily *Victoria amazonica*, today a close relative *Victoria* 'Longwood hybrid' is grown with leaves 2m across when fully grown. They had not reached that size in April but I did spy a giant catfish of about that length in one of the ponds inside the conservatory! However, I looked in vain for the giant tadpole Axolotl. Time to cool down so we left the tropics and went outside to explore the rock garden.

Kew is constantly changing and updating its attractions, perhaps spurred on by its inclusion in 2003 on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites the next addition next to the rock garden will be the new Alpine



Barbara over the lily pond



House, which from the plans will be another impressive and innovative building due to be opened this Summer. In the meantime we were content to walk through the garden admiring flowering plants from America and Europe I was particularly attracted to *Aquilegia canadensis*, *Iris lutescens*, *Gentiana acaulis*, *Globularia trichosantha* and the magnificent *Paeonia kavacanensis*

Yet another new attraction since Summer 2004 is 'Climbers and Creepers' which we heard that some Wiltshire botanists had visited only to find it is a play area for children, aged 3-9! It is advertised as Britain's "first interactive play zone where children can learn (amongst other things) what it is like for an insect to be 'eaten' by a giant pitcher plant". We hope this generation are inspired by these early experiences to become interested in plants because sadly the opportunities to be inspired by the woodlands and other natural habitats are not as great as they once were.

Fortunately for us we were able to visit an area of Kew not normally open to the general public and hear about conservation in the woodland habitat around Queen Charlotte's Cottage. She was given the cottage in 1761 when she married George III and it was used by the family for shelter and occasional meals. Although Kew gardens was given to the nation in 1840 the cottage remained part of the royal estate until Queen Victoria ceded it and its 15 hectares to Kew to commemorate her Diamond Jubilee. The grounds had been rarely visited and the one condition was that the grounds should be left in their naturalistic state. This condition was supported by the Linnaean Society on behalf of all ornithologists to maintain the area as a suburban haven for birds. Nowadays it is managed to encourage native flora and fauna. Many British species of tree are represented including oak, beech, holly and yew interspersed with a few exotics from Victorian times such as the Monkey Puzzle tree, the Turkey oak and the beautiful red oak. There are rare native trees such as the Plymouth pear and the Bristol mountain ash. We were able to see the first of the bluebells emerging and commented on the striking contrast with the lime green *Smyrniium perfoliatum*, Perforate Alexanders. Unfortunately, although it is much admired it is proving to be a proliferating alien and conservation volunteers attempt to remove it before it sets seed along with another undesirable, the sparse-flowered leek.

In spite of these unwanted or at least tolerated visitors, Kew has a good record for animal species with 3 species of bat - pipistrelle, noctule, and Daubentons, badgers, foxes, 128 species of birds, 23 species of butterfly, dragonflies and damselfly. This is a good record considering Kew is in London. The conservation area includes a stag beetle loggery, part of the London Biodiversity Action Plan for Stag Beetles, a dipping pond and a walk through a badger set for children. We were told that good housewives made their own rush lights from hard rush, whereas bad housewives bought candles at 1/2d each. Needless to say some of us tried our hand at this old skill and perhaps confirmed that many of us are pretty bad housewives! We were introduced to Thale Cress *Arabidopsis thaliana* which has the privilege of being the first species of plant to have its complete genome worked out. It is an interesting experience admiring the finest bluebell wood in the London area carpeted with a true British native (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) while ring-necked parakeets screech overhead.

Leaving the conservation area I was keen to find the jade vine, *Strongylodon macrobotrys* in the palm house and sure enough it was producing its curiously coloured luminous green inflorescence. In 1995 it produced seed for the first time after scientists from Kew's Jodrell Laboratory artificially pollinated it but its habitat in the Philippines has been reduced to 20% and the identity of its natural pollinator is still unknown.

My last memory is of the colourful formal planting of tulips and pansies in purples, mauves and whites in front of the Palm House. A visit to Kew always leaves you with a need to visit again as Kew changes so dramatically with the seasons. I read an inscription on a memorial bench "As a child for just a penny I could visit Kew". I hope the next generation will also look back on their first visit, it costs considerably more now but there is so much to see.

Carol Wood

Sunday 24 April 2005

Avon Gorge

Leader - Sharon Pilkington

Ten of us, under the very knowledgeable leadership of Sharon Pilkington, explored the early treasures of this famous locality at a more than leisurely pace. We were hardly out of our cars at the Sea Mills viewpoint before we encountered on a wall a rare plant to which most people wouldn't give a second glance. This was Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*), with no petals, delightful to see once!

A short walk led to plants of more aesthetic appeal, growing mostly on the limestone rock. The Bristol Rock-cress (*Arabis scabra*) is not known in the British Isles outside the Avon Gorge area, though it occurs on mountains in mainland Europe. Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) is another rarity, an umbel with male and female flowers on different plants, flowering early here. Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla neumanniana*) is yet another rarity, with brilliant yellow flowers, distinguishable from other cinquefoils by subtle differences in the leaves. We looked here for the rare *Cerastium pumilum* but found only *C. glomeratum*. On



Spiked Speedwell - photo John Presland



Spring Cinquefoil

photo John Presland

observatory. On hidden paths below the tourists, we were shown more Bristol Rock-cress and Spring Cinquefoil, Rosy Garlic (*Allium roseum*) and Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*) in bud, whilst all around us bloomed the delicately yellow Alexanders (*Smyrniololus atrum*), a plant which can grow up to about 6 feet high and is rarely found more than a few miles from the sea - except in Wiltshire, where many wonders are performed! At great personal peril, we climbed down to see what our leader, perched on a cliff edge and apparently about to fall to her doom, assured us were

an area of rock, scree and poor soil below we saw the leaves of Small Scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*), Round-leaved Cranesbill (*Geranium rotundifolium*) beginning to flower and the fern Rustyback (*Ceterach officinarum*) with the underside of its fronds completely covered in brown scales. In the woodland below, as well as a selection of woodland flowers in bloom, was a



Hutchinsia - photo John Presland

substantial colony of Fingered Sedge (*Carex digitata*).

After lunch, we moved to the area round the



Round-leaved Cranesbill

photo John Presland

the remaining fruits of the very early-flowering Hutchinsia (*Hornungia petraea*), another of the gorge's



specialities. Beside it was another, Spiked Speedwell (*Veronica spicata*), represented by last year's fruiting spikes.

Back to the safety of the public area, we viewed a small area of mown grass hosting a number of plants in mini-rockery style, notably Wild Clary (*Salvia horminoides*). This brought to a conclusion a fascinating experience of rare wild plants in beautiful surroundings.

John Presland



Wednesday 4 May 2005

Pepperbox Hill: Juniper Survey

The Wiltshire Botanical Society and Plantlife held a joint event at Pepperbox Hill to survey Juniper. The aim was to carry out a Juniper census, get an idea of the health of the Juniper population and to feed results into the Plantlife Juniper Survey. Juniper is one of our most threatened species. It supports a wide range of wildlife and its decline has wide reaching impacts.

Groups were given carefully designated areas, so that the youngest and fittest fought with impenetrable scrub whilst more experience members were offered less challenging terrain. We all worked hard and managed to cover the whole area by mid afternoon. A total of 357 bushes was recorded and there were clear differences between those lying to the west of the site (demarcated by a line of Oaks which runs north to south down the slope) and those to the east. The plants to the west were smaller and in much better health. This is mainly because they have suffered less overcrowding over the past 50 years whilst those to the east have only recently – and rather too late – been released from a mass of other woody species. Sadly, there was no evidence of active regeneration and only 4% of the bushes could be classified as young. 57% were mature, 37% old and 3% dead. The intense grazing of the site by rabbits is certainly an important factor in the lack of seedlings and it is probable that those bushes which we currently regard as mature regenerated during the post – myxomatosis period of the 1950s.

Katherine Stewart is currently writing a report for the National Trust and more detailed information will also be published in the Plantlife Magazine and in Wiltshire Botany. I am fortunate in having some photographs taken in 1955 by the late Noel Chadwick, who was a member of the Flora Mapping Group. I have photographed the area on several occasions since I first became familiar with it in 1970 and so we should be able to match our records with photographic evidence of the progression of the site from grassland to scrub over the past 50 years. Katherine is also offering to the National Trust the volunteers from Plantlife to monitor and management initiatives which NT might wish to establish. This might be the start of yet another project

Pat Woodruffe

Wednesday 25 May 2005

Ron Hurst's Garden and Simon Young's Nursery

The morning of Wednesday the 25th May was spent looking at a fascinating selection of plants at these two venues. At a recent AGM, Ron had shown slides of his garden, but nothing could really have prepared us for such a vast array of plants in what is really a very limited space. He had managed to find room for a greenhouse, which he designed and built himself from hardwood in 1997, a pond which he constructed in 1999, - a pergola which he put up in 2000, and several raised beds. Most of the plants he has grown from seed, and he told us that he sows seed of up to 100 species most years, though not all survive and flower. A particularly eye-catching little plant growing up against the house was *Linaria maroccana* in a variety of contrasting colours. Its much taller relative, the yellow *Linaria dalmatica*, displayed itself well in a different part of the garden. Euphorbias were well 'to the fore' with 14 species and cultivars, including *E. martinis*, *E. griffithii* 'Dixter' and 'Fireglow', and *E. characias* in many different colour forms. The tall *Nectaroscordum siculum* was seeding itself around liberally, as was *Smyrniium perfoliatum*. *Corydalis flexuosa* added a touch of blue, and it isn't often one has the chance to see *Ranunculus myconi* growing in a garden. Native plants are among Ron's special interests, and these included *Nymphoides peltata*, *Pimpinella major rosea*, *Potentilla rupestris* and *Listera ovata*. Shrubs and trees were well represented, ranging from the small but very decorative *Halimolobos salicifolia* to a fine specimen of *Ceanothus* 'Paget's Blue'. Also in the collection were *Clematis armandii*, *Weigela aurea*, *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*, *Ginkgo biloba* and *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*. This is only a very small selection of the plants that we saw, but it may serve to give some idea of the diversity in Ron's very special and very personal garden, which is an object lesson in how to make maximum use of a relatively small area.

Visiting Simon Young on the same day as Ron Hurst was a clever bit of planning because, quite apart from the fact that they are only a few miles apart, the plants in the two gardens complement each other so well. We looked first at Simon's nursery, and it was soon evident that he has a number of specialities such as Alliums, Epimediums and Salvias. A selection of Chinese Epimediums included *E. wushanense* and *E. x omeiense* 'Akame'. The pink *Allium unifolium* was one of a number of plants purchased from the nursery. Others that were noted were *Anchusa azurea*, *Melittis melissophyllum*, the dark red *Astrantia major* 'Hadspen Blood', *Amicia zygomeris* which is a yellow pea with prominent stipules, hardy orchids and a range of shade-loving species. In the garden were more Alliums including the very attractive *Allium roseum*, several specimens each of *Acanthus mollis* and *A. spinosus*, and round the pond *Iris sibirica* and a number of British natives such as *Carex paniculata*, *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and a white Epimedium. In a different part of the garden we were shown the curious *Saruma henryi*, the name being an anagram of *Asarum* to which it is related. It was difficult to tear oneself away in time for lunch and the afternoon walk.

Jeremy Wood

Wednesday 25 May 2005

Cleeve Wood

After an excellent pub lunch we arrived at Hinton Charterhouse (only a few minutes late) and met up with several other members. It was not until we had walked some distance along a track that we realised that the 'A team' - of a further four members - was ahead of us.

Botanising started in earnest just before we entered the wood. Ron told us that the track used to be lined by numerous plants of Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*). Intensive agriculture appears to have brought about their demise, but we did find quite a few clumps in flower. In the wood itself we were soon able to spot the leaves and flower buds of Bath Asparagus *O. pyrenaicum*, which should be a sight in a week or so. Twayblades (*Listera ovata*) thrived along some parts of the track. Another interesting find was a single plant of Meadow Saffron *Colchicum autumnale*.

Several clearings within the wood provided warm spots for some grassland plants. In the first of these we were able to see healthy populations of Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), a number of Broomrape – most probably *Orobancha minor* – and a few flowers of *Geranium pratense*. The second opening revealed ten or more Fly Orchids (*Ophrys insectifera*). It was nice to photograph some dry ones, rather than the drenched ones we encountered at Homefield Wood a few days earlier. We also found one spike of White Helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*). Some of us then delved into the finer points of sedge identification and tried to turn *Carex caryophyllea* into something far more exciting. Sadly, a calm look at 'Jermy' later in the day dispelled all such ideas as it keyed out perfectly.

Further down into the valley we spotted several damselflies, the most stunning of which was a female Banded Agrion, glistening in the sun. Another interesting, non-botanical find was a group of 2-spot ladybirds on nettles on the track back to our cars.

Our thanks to Ron and Simon for a great and varied day.

Pat Woodruffe

Tuesday 7 June 2005, a.m.

Great Cheverell Hill - the morning

Leader: Nigel Cope

Twelve members met on a beautiful sunny June morning and were introduced to the area by Nigel Cope, who has been looking after and monitoring it on a voluntary basis for over 20 years. Great Cheverell Hill is part of the Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA) and owned by the Ministry of Defence. The nationally important chalk grasslands have SSSI status and are managed by winter grazing, which helps to control scrub. Parts are heavily grazed by rabbits.

One of the highlights of the morning was the nationally scarce endemic Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), long known from the site and present in very good numbers, although often scattered. Its importance is recognised by its protection under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. We were also pleased to see abundant Burnt Orchid (*Orchis ustulata*), Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and common spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*). A few lesser butterfly orchids (*Platanthera bifolia*) were also seen. Nigel reported finding a single Greater Butterfly Orchid (*P. chlorantha*) in 2004. Bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), the nationally scarce root parasite, was flowering in places and the procumbent form of Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*), considered to be native in Wiltshire, was also in flower. Members remarked on the particular abundance of Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*), one of the food plants of the Adonis Blue (*Lysandra bellargus*). We were fortunate to see a few of these butterflies, even though they were not as abundant as hoped, perhaps because, although sunny, it was quite breezy. A single Marsh Fritillary (*Eurodryas aurinia*) was also spotted.

Towards the end of the morning, we were shown some Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum angustifolium*). A few plants in scrub were still in flower, although those in the open grassland, where they are apparently abundant, were over. There was some discussion about whether or not this plant is native. The Wiltshire Flora (1993) states that it appears to be native in grasslands in the SPTA, but the New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora (2002) treats all records as introductions.

Although billed as a morning only meeting, Nigel was able to stay on to show members some further areas of grassland. Approximately half of the group were able to take advantage of this.

Anne Appleyard



Tuesday 7 June 2005, p.m.

Great Cheverell Hill - the afternoon

We had the chance to explore a further two valleys on this glorious afternoon. We walked to the first of them through an area which has been changed from arable to grassland over a period of about 10 years. The farm is an organic one and the process of reversion quite simply involved allowing the natural seedbank to germinate. Over this time some topping and grazing has been implemented in order to manage the developing grassland. The results were amazing, with a wide range of chalk grassland plants coming in, including a Spotted Orchid and two Bee Orchids. Nigel told us that in the first few years dandelions had dominated but that gradually succession had played its part and, as the nutrient levels declined, so a more interesting and typical sward developed.

On the downland itself were Burnt Orchids, much more numerous than seen in the morning, and some enormous Early Gentians – quite the size of Felwort. At this point the word 'hybridisation' crept into the conversation but it is hard to understand how this could happen when the two (species, subspecies, varieties?) flower at such different times. In the next few hours we enjoyed the sight of many more Lesser Butterfly Orchids as well as the more common species. The butterflies too were wonderful, many Adonis Blues, some Small Blues, a most accommodating Marsh Fritillary and several Small Heath.

Our grateful thanks go to Nigel Cope, who so effectively helps in the management of the reserve. We were delighted to see the results of his efforts.

Pat Woodruffe

Friday 8 July 2005

Chimney Meadows, West of Oxford

The first visit of our weekend around Oxford was Chimney Meadows, a Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) reserve West of the City; 200 hectares of farmland were purchased 2 years ago adjoining a National Nature Reserve (NNR) already managed by the Trust, making it their largest reserve.

As we approached the car park we saw a scrape being filled with water for the house martins, who made good use of it on this lovely day.

Kerry, an enthusiastic warden for BBOWT, told about the Anglo-Saxon burial ground and relics of medieval farming on the site – it has a long history.

The newly purchased land needed restoring to its original species-rich state. This is where the NNR was so useful. This is a very high grade MG4 flood plain, amongst the very best in the country. Last year the hay was cut in July and spread over the farmland and the result was spectacular. After only 1 year Meadow Brown and Marbled White butterflies fluttered over *Centaurea scabiosa* (Greater knapweed) *Silene silaus* (Pepper-saxifrage) and fine grasses – a phenomenal success story; the control plot was typical arable ground. Many surveys were in progress here, comparing the results of differing management.

The worm survey intrigued us. Ed, a helper doing work experience from school, had spent the previous day digging out a spade width of soil and counting the worms. He said he enjoyed it! Pit-fall traps for insects were in operation and suction sampling for pollination surveys, also butterfly and bird transects. Oxford University academics were helping with insect identification. It must be useful to have lots of experts around.

Reaching the NNR was exciting. The flora was quite stunning, comparable to Clattinger Meadow, but subtly



Field Woundwort (*Stachys Arvensis*)

different. The *Orchis morio* (Green-winged Orchid) was over, but *Briza media* (Quaking grass) was exceptionally tall and made a magical scene with *Thalictrum flavum* (Meadow Rue), *Centaurea scabiosa* (Greater Knapweed), *Stachys officinalis* (Betony), *Silene silaus* (Pepper-saxifrage), *Leucanthemum vulgare* (Oxeye daisy) and the abundant *Carex hostiana* (Tawny Sedge).

We walked back past a pond alive with dragonflies, an Emperor, Chasers, Skimmers and Hawkers and plenty of small blue damselflies.

We then reached a field which had received the same hay-spreading treatment as the first one but what a contrast! *Bromopsis sterilis* was dominant, probably due to excess phosphorus.

The memory of Chimney Meadows will be with us as a brilliant example of arable reversion, just when so many of us are searching for arable weeds for the FWAG project

A fantastic beginning to our weekend

Joy Newton



Chama sp. in the bog



Hairy caterpillar

Residential Visit to Oxfordshire, 8th to 10th July 2005

After our afternoon at Chimney Meadows, we all met up on the Friday night to stay in student lodgings at Oxford Brookes University. There were a few problems to sort out – our self-catering accommodation had beautiful kitchens, but not a plate, cup, knife, fork, spoon or saucepan! The skeleton holiday staff rose to the challenge and had survival kits in six kitchens by bedtime. Another was being locked in or out of the car park. Tokens to open the barrier could only be obtained one at a time and were swallowed forever by the machine. We developed some skill in getting a convoy of cars through on one token. However, we were undaunted by such minor problems.

The rest of the campus was filled with foreign students from all over the world, who treated us to a non-stop fashion show. Surprisingly, one Japanese student

wanted us to tell her about the wild plants around the houses. We also found some botanical interest; for instance, one bank had a Long-headed Poppy amongst the Common Poppies.

The local pub provided mountainous plates of food, but was somewhat thrown by our numbers and tendency to re-arrange the tables to look like a game of dominoes. Afterwards, all good botanists should have a good night's sleep and rise early, but that didn't stop the usual kitchen gatherings with bottles of wine and other goodies.

Richard Aisbitt



*Pat, Kerry and Rosemary -
planning the route at Chimney*

Friday, 8 July 2005.

Parsonage Moor, Cothill.

In the afternoon we had the good fortune to be shown around the reserve by the Reserves Manager for Oxford, Martin Lane. He has 33 reserves to manage. A tree lined path leads to the reserve and it was a wonderful surprise to find a peaty fen at the end of the path. The reserve vegetation consists of short fen going into long reed (NVC M13). It lies in a limestone hollow and the many springs from the limestone form runnels making an area of alkaline and acid reaction. The tufa effects are most interesting. The runnels have to be dug out from time to time. One of the first insects we saw was a Scarlet Tiger Moth. Cothill was where Professor E.B. Ford made his 25-year study of this day flying moth. A rarer resident was the Southern Damselfly in company with 100 other Red Data Book insects.

The reserve has just as many rare and unusual plants. Grass of Parnassus, Round and Oblong-leaved Sundews, Stonewort and Bladderwort were on the reserve but access too dangerous. As it was the ground was quaking beneath our feet on the main path, and to step off might have been to disappear forever! Among the plants we saw were Broad-leaved Cotton-grass, Bog Pimpernel, Common Butterwort, Common Quaking Grass, Dyer's Greenweed, Marsh Helleborine, Saw-wort, Meadow Thistle, Marsh Arrowgrass, Marsh Lousewort, Greater Tussock Sedge and Blunt-flowered Rush. We met a Lizard on the boardwalk and saw a young Grass Snake. Water Vole and Shrew find a home here too.

Management is by teams of six conservation trainees. Exmoor ponies are put on to graze at the end of July and taken off in October having created a moonscape

effect by then. In the past, villagers cut the peat and burned it to use the resulting ash on their gardens. Peat is still cut every ten years as part of fen management.

We left the reserve along the path stopping to rest and admire an ancient sprawling Ash tree providing a welcome perch for many types of traveller. As we walked along the road to Dry Sandford, some children called out "Look! Hiking Grannies!" Well, very happy Grannies, anyway.

Marjorie Waters



'Happy Grannies' - photo Marjorie Waters



Otmoor - photo Pat Woodruffe

12c Saturday 9 July, morning

Otmoor

Otmoor is a large expanse of low-lying land situated to the east of Oxford, one part of which is owned by MOD and used as a rifle range. We could not believe our luck when we learnt that an army exercise had been refused in order that our visit could go ahead. Not only

were we so fortunate to gain access but, in particular, to see the hay meadows at their best, just before cutting. Camilla Lambrick, who is a member of the conservation group (representing the Oxford Rare Plants Group), showed us around the site, concentrating on one meadow which has populations of *Viola persicifolia* and a total species list of 162, including some 16 species of *Carex*. Grasses most definitely took the back seat.



Barbara Last and Mollie Perraton - photo Pat Woodruffe

Our first impression of the meadow was of a mass of *Filipendula ulmaria*, *Centaurea nigra* (with large ray florets that made the plants look more like *C. scabiosa*), *Thalictrum flavum* and patches of *Cirsium dissectum*. Close inspection revealed so much more! *Festuca filiformis*, *Carex pulicaris*, *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, *Lythrum salicaria*, *Oenanthe fistulosa*, *Serratula tinctoria*, *Silene silaus*, *Stellaria palustre* and *Veronica catenata* are just a few of the less common plants which we found.

After a wonderful leisurely session botanising in this rich meadow, we headed

off to locate a 'pill' or shallow pond where we squelched our way to see *Hottonia palustris* and *Utricularia vulgaris* growing amongst *Carex riparia* and other more common water plants. Not content with these finds, we managed to spot about 25 plants of *Pimpinella major* growing on the side of a ditch on our return.

Back at the site office, the range warden, Harvey Swift, showed us photographs of the site flooded during the winter months as well as some of a barn owl. During our visit a red kite was spotted overhead. The development of an RSPB reserve on adjacent land should enhance the richness and biodiversity of this area and the management of the miles blackthorn hedgerows is essential to the welfare of the brown and black hairstreak butterflies which inhabit the sites.

We were all delighted with the effort Camilla put into showing us the site and very pleased indeed to have not only added a few species to her list but also confirmed a number which had previously been seen only occasionally.

Pat Woodruffe



Greater Bladderwort: *Utricularia vulgaris*



Camilla paddling

Sunday 13 July, morning

Warburg Reserve

We were shown around the reserve by Roger, the assistant warden, who informed us that the ancient beech woods were left unmanaged, the main conservation effort being focussed on maintaining and recreating herb-rich grassland, which occupied around 10% of the reserve. On leaving the car park with its colony of **Vervain** (*Verbena officinalis*), we were taken up onto a south-sloping hillside, originally cleared



Dark Mullein (Verbascum nigrum)

as a rifle range, and now successively enlarged year-by-year by clearing the mature birch scrub, using volunteer labour. Sheep, and sometimes Exmoor ponies are fenced in on this area from October to late March, and localised patches of some 20 x 20m are then fenced and further grazed intensively by 10 sheep, for one week during the summer, to remove regenerating birch and dogwood. They are then left ungrazed the following summer to display their flowers.

The whole area was blanketed by **Marjoram** and **Eyebright** with patches of *Verbascum nigrum*, **Common Milkwort** (*Polygala vulgaris*), **Wild Parsnip**, **Clustered Bellflower**, scattered **Pyramidal** and **Common Spotted Orchid**, and one caged **Lesser Butterfly Orchid**, (*Platanthera bifolia*) [now over], plus several just emerging **Helleborines** with narrow leaves (probably **Violet Helleborine**), and several healthy clusters of **Broad-leaved Helleborine**. **'Common' Gromwell** plants were scattered all over the area, one of them obligingly still retaining a few of



Chiltern Gentian (or hybrid?)



its last year's ivory-white seeds. Both **Perforate** and **Hairy St John's-wort** grew together in this area along with numerous other typical chalk grassland species.

We were then taken up to the high-level pasture, where a large area had been fenced in by rabbit-proof electric fencing for the flowering season. This area is grazed by sheep over the autumn and winter, and then left to flower the following summer. Enormous numbers of fruiting heads of **Cowslip** were evident, and numerous **Pyramidal Orchids**, together with a wide variety of chalk grassland species, including leafy shoots of both the **Autumn** and **Chiltern Gentians**, yet to come into flower, and **Thymus pulegioides**. Further over on another hillock, additional plants of **Chiltern Gentian** and numerous **Stemless Thistle** (*Cirsium acaule*) occurred in a currently unfenced area. Leaving this site, and briefly traversing a section of the cycle track, we came across several plants of **Nettle-leaved Bellflower** (*Campanula trachelium*).

Making our way up a steeply rising sunken lane through a beech hanger, we were shown empty cages where the **Narrow-lipped Helleborine** (*Epipactis leptochila*) had appeared last year, (but not this so far), and a short distance up over the bank and into the woodland, a damp hollow rewarded us with around 30 spikes of **Yellow Bird's-nest** (*Monotropa hypopitys*).

On returning to the car park for lunch, some of the party had a look at the visitors' centre. Here a fat guide

to the reserve was on sale, listing not only all the organisms that had ever been recorded on the reserve, but how these had changed with time, and how the reserve had been managed to achieve its current biodiversity – very impressive!

Ken Adams



Sunday 10 July, afternoon

Greenham Common and Bowdown Woods

Leader - Malcolm Storey

Our final stop of the day was another interesting venue - Greenham Common and Bowdown Woods. We were given an introduction to the site by Malcolm. In 1992 Greenham Common Airbase was declared redundant for military purposes. The Common was bought by the Greenham Common Trust in 1997 and reopened to the public in 2000. During the clean up of the site, the fuel storage tanks were lifted and the resulting holes in the ground eventually became ponds. Contamination resulted from 60 years of aviation fuel storage in these large (and inevitably leaky after so long a time) tanks. Bioremediation is a process whereby millions of natural fuel degrading bacteria are sprayed onto the contaminated soil and gravel which had surrounded the tanks. This avoided the use of chemicals and solved the problem of cleaning up in a natural way. This innovative process was developed especially for the site and has worked successfully at the fuel depot sites where it has been used. The bioremediation process was completed by 2003.

Humps were created with some of the gravel and these are now being colonised by various plants such as viper's bugloss, common centaury, lesser hawkbit (*Leontodon saxatilis*), American Willowherb (*Epilobium ciliatum*) and biting stonecrop. Other plants seen on the site were common and small cudweeds and by or in the ponds common water-plantain and jointed rush (*Juncus articulatus*). There were exquisite broad-bodies chaser and emperor flying over the water.

We didn't last very long on the Common, as it was an extremely hot, sunny afternoon so we escaped into the shade of Bowdown Woods on the other side of the road. Here we saw many plants including ling, wood sage and blue fleabane (*Erigeron acer*).

Before we all parted we walked back across the baking common to the car park where a most welcome sight awaited us - Chris Storey with cold drinks, tea, coffee, biscuits and the remains of Malcolm's birthday cake, all set out under the shade of a large umbrella. This afternoon tea was a lifesaver! Thank you Chris. We set off back home, tired but happy after a wonderful three days. Many thanks to Pat for organising it all so well.

Jean Wall

Friday 22 July 2005

Spye Park

On arriving at the car park to start our walk, we were confronted with a long-since familiar corn crop that turned out to be **Rye** (after a quick sneak in Hubbard), identifiable by its pairs of florets on a common stalk, strangely nursing vast numbers of sycamore seedlings, almost as if under sown. Plants of **Heartsease** (*Viola arvensis*) were in flower here, with the upper pair of petals tinged with purple, and several patches of **Aphanes australis**, the **Parsley-piert** of non-calcareous soils. Out on the heath, now sadly planted up with Forestry Commission conifers, our leader Dave Green pointed out two Wiltshire rarities minisculed by the drought, **Birdsfoot** (*Ornithopus perpusillus*), and more abundantly, **Buck's-horn Plantain** (*Plantago coronopus*), latterly making its appearance elsewhere in Wiltshire on salted verges. **Pill Sedge** (*Carex pilulifera*) was also abundant here at one of its few N. Wilts sites. At the beginning of the track a few patches of **Autumnal Hawkbit** (*Leontodon autumnalis*) were in flower enabling us to contrast its flower heads with the less common, but here very abundant, **Lesser Hawkbit** (*Leontodon saxatilis* = *taraxacoides* = *leysii*), - a good case for sticking to the common name! - And some stunted residual **Cat's-ear** (*Hypochaeris radicata*). It was good also to see a fair scattering of **Harebells** (*Campanula rotundifolia*), sadly rapidly disappearing in counties further east.

At one point someone dared to ask what the **Agrostis** was all over the heath! Some of it was obviously **A.**

stolonifera, and some of it **A. capillaris** (= *tenuis*), but yet other material had rhizomes, and looked big enough for **A. gigantea**. Back home, laborious dissection of its florets under the microscope, frustrated by the awns on its lemmas which catapulted most of the dissected flowers across the kitchen! - revealed however that it had what is euphemistically called a 'vestigial' palea - at only 0.2mm long, and paper thin, its one of the most frustrating characters that a botanist can be confronted with. It was however enough to nail our plant down to **A. vinealis** (**A. canina** var. *montana*), an under recorded plant in most Vice Counties. No prizes for guessing why! Had it possessed stolons instead of rhizomes it would have been **A. canina** sens.str., the only other **Agrostis** with a minute palea.

Leaving the heath, we dived down a rocky stream, with lumps of ironstone tripping the unwary, and soon entered a vast bed of **Giant Hogweed**, and a glorious abundance of **Lady-ferns**,



**Golden-scaled
Male-ferns and
Opposite-leaved
Golden Saxifrage.**

Jack Oliver, tape at the ready, hugged a huge *Pinus sylvestris* and announced that its girth was 3.9m at a height of 1.5m. At the confluence with the other tributary that joined our stream from the northwest, a boggy marsh supported a bed of *Carex paniculata* and

Scirpus sylvaticus. Also near the confluence the nettles looked unusual, with long narrow leaves and virtually no stinging hairs. They were almost certainly the **Fen Nettle** (*Urtica galeopsifolia*), the diploid version and probable parent of our tetraploid **Stinging Nettle**. Unfortunately we did not take a specimen back to check the size of the basal bulbs of the hairs to clinch it! As we climbed the path beside this other valley, Dave pointed out that it had never been ploughed or sprayed, and that before it became overgrown, *Carex laevigata*, *Carex echinata* and *Wahlenbergia hederacea* had been recorded there. At one point we stooped under a giant fallen oak, still supporting two large colonies of the fern *Polypodium interjectum*, and nearby a still standing healthy oak had an amazing girth of 10.9m. Several huge *Wellingtonias* skirted the path, one of which, Jack and Lesley established was 6.47m in girth, which on the reasonable assumption of 1 inch per year, gave it an age of c.260 yrs. Sadly two more trees further along the track of similar dimensions had snuffed it.

After devouring our lunch on the greensward in front of Spye Park House, another oak was lovingly engirdled but was found to be a mere 9.8m around. Taking the old Roman track east and down by the lake, we came across enough Mallard on the water to supply everyone in Wilts who might fancy one for Christmas, and among the weeds coming in with the duck food, several plants of **Shaggy Soldier** (*Galinsoga*



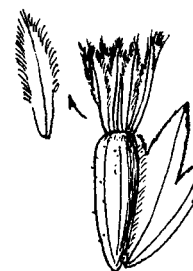
We measure trees



Dave Green in the Tussock Sedge

quadriradiata (= *ciliata*)) [spiny feathery scales on its achenes], and **Annual Nettle** (*Urtica urens*) made for the unusual, plus a strange **Feverfew** with enormous flowers. [N.B. The two alien, but now well established **Galinsogas**, not only have feathery scales (spine-tipped or not) on top of their achenes, but

further scales at the base of their achenes as well (*fleur-de-lis* or plain lanceolate)].



Galinsoga quadriradiata (= *ciliata*) *Galinsoga parviflora*

Climbing out of the valley, Dave led us into a couple of arable fields, the first of Maize with its usual seed contaminant *Amaranthus retroflexus*, together with *Solanum nigrum*. The next, we could be forgiven for thinking was a crop of **Pineappleweed** (*Matricaria discoidea* (= *matricarioides*)). Here Dave winkled out a plant of *Geranium pusillum*, which we were able to compare with nearby *G. molle*, and Speckled Grasshoppers abounded. Also in this field several plants of a Knotweed turned out to be the **Corn Knotweed** (*Polygonum rurivagum*). All the leaves were less than 3mm wide, and the ripe seeds projected beyond the perianth by almost half their length. At the other end of the same fallow field, a large patch of **Bugloss** (*Anchusa arvensis*) was in full flower amid a sea of **Corn Spurrey** (*Spergula arvensis*), the latter looking in seed superficially like a crop of linseed. Leaving this field, we plunged once again into the upper reaches of our first valley, finding little of outstanding interest but for a minute plant of *Hypericum humifusum*, which the sharp eyes of someone in each of the several, by then straggly groups, managed to spot independently! Many thanks to Dave Green for leading a very rewarding day in the field.

Ken Adams

Tuesday 2 July 2005

Willows and Poplars

Leader: Jack Oliver

Fourteen Wilts Botsoc members were given a very enjoyable guided tour of Jack Oliver's arboretum at Clatford, 2 miles west of Marlborough on Tuesday 2nd July 2005. It is on the River Kennet flood plain with the river running beside it. Jack has been able to use river water to help distressed trees during the dry summer, though he gets a few more frosts than most because the valley collects cold air on clear nights. Jack is incredibly knowledgeable on his collection of 2000 trees, which includes 25 species of willows. Willows are prone to hybridise (some of us quipped that they were 'promiscuous!'), and Jack had made a table tracing the parentage or pedigree of one willow specimen, which looked like a string of DNA characters!

Jack started up the arboretum in 1992, on a 2.5 hectare field which is on alluvial soil with chalk foundation. It used to be water meadow but has been drained by inserting ditches. Also, there used to be a weir on the river apparently, which raised the river to water the meadows. The oldest tree Jack has is a riverside willow, *Salix alba*, at 250 years of age. It grows on the riverbank, and had previously got very large and had gradually keeled over so as to obstruct the river, so the river authority cut it back. Since then it had grown a secondary, then a tertiary array of trunks at crazy angles to the old original stump. *S. alba* is also the willow used for cricket bats, because the trunks are nice and straight. Willows and Poplars/Aspens are two separate genera, of equal ranking in the family tree (no pun intended), being in the family *Salicaceae* of the order *Salicales*. In turn the subclass Dicotyledones, class Angiospermae, phylum Spermatophyta and kingdom Plantae completes their genealogy, thanks to www.biologybrowser.org which also says there is debate on the classifications.

We were treated to one or two experiments, such as peeling back the bark of *Salix purpurea* to see the brilliant yellow on the inside of the bark. 'Purpurea' might seem a misnomer, but arises because the catkins are purple (we were well outside the catkin season). *S. triandra* has a cinnamon colour on the bare trunk where bark has been removed. The bare wood under the bark was ridged in the case of one variety of willow which made it unique. Our noses came into play to check for some trees' scents and odours. A sweet smell of balsam was very strong from one poplar species (*Populus trichocarpa*). A distinct smell of lemon emanated from Lemon Balm, a plant, not a tree. Mind you, I personally find my nose is rather insensitive, as I can walk through a square kilometre of oilseed rape in full flower and not smell it! The aspect ratio (width/length) of willow leaves reached an extreme with the thin-leaved *Salix viminalis*, at 1:10. The genus *Salix* (Willows) gives its

name, and extracts, to salicylic acid, the active ingredient of the drug Aspirin.

Jack has gone to the trouble of having durable weatherproof labels displayed on every single tree in his collection. He found that a company in the Hebrides made the best labels, but they weren't cheap. The labels are very informative, listing Latin and common names, hybrids, and provenance. Many of Jack's trees come from foreign parts. Silesian willow is named after the area formerly in Germany up to 1945 but now in Poland. The tree is a fast grower which is good for stabilising slag heaps around collieries, so we pondered if Silesia's coalfield had anything to do with its name. He has had gifts of trees from Botsoc members Joy Newton, who was with us on this outing, and Barbara Last who gave him a tree with enormous thorns 5 cm long! Jack often obtained his trees in pairs in case one failed to survive. Also apple trees were used as markers for small seedlings, and apple trees were planted beside to provide protection from deer etc.

Jack has a big job keeping the nettles at bay, at least on the paths around the estate, but nevertheless Eileen Rollo managed to get stung through her trousers, yet I, with bare legs found the nettles brushed lightly against my legs without stinging me. I think hairs on one's skin break off the delicate glass-like poison spears before they empty themselves into you. The arboretum had one 'record' plant: Cleaver or Goose-grass which is stated in all the books to grow to a maximum of 2 metres, but Jack's were 3 metres tall. The plant is so obstinate that pulling it down with machinery may also pull down the tree it is enfolds.

"Biomass" is something willows should know about because they are the best plant for turning into alcohol, in turn used to run power stations etc. The idea is that biomass fuel puts the same CO₂ into the atmosphere that the growing plant took out. This is true of coal and oil too, but that 'biomass' got buried over 300 million years, and we are burning it all in the last 100 years!

Richard Gosnell,

August 2005

Sunday 14 August 2005

Bromham Market Gardens

We had been going to survey arable weeds at West Lavington but with only a few days' warning heard that the farm was species-poor. There was some hasty phone and e-mail traffic and we transferred to the market gardening area at Bromham. This was a most felicitous change as we had a remarkable morning.



Weasel's Snout

The area looks odd, for a start. It is flat and substantially without trees, hedges or fences. The soil is very soft, dry, reddish sand. The land is divided into long strips of varying width looking as if they are the descendants, almost unchanged, of a Medieval open field system. The crops, and the stage of cultivation, change from strip to strip – there were potatoes, courgettes, carrots, spinach and beetroot at harvest stage, various cabbagey things being planted out, pumpkins swelling nicely, some bare plots, some apparently abandoned. Most of the weeds were unusually luxuriant, for instance *Erodium cicutarium* (Common Stork's-bill) was so large and luscious we scarcely recognised it at first glance.

The first thing that stopped us was *Galinsoga parviflora* (Gallant Soldier) growing abundantly but there was also *G. ciliata* (Shaggy Soldier – now *G. quadriradiata*). It seemed strange that a pair of such similar plants should be growing together but we soon got our eyes accustomed. Gallant Soldier is smooth-shaven and

glossy; Shaggy Soldier has bristly stems.

Then came an unfamiliar *Solanum* rather like *S. nigrum* but too green, too smooth, too spreading in habit. This was nailed as *Solanum sarachoides*, originally from Brazil but here it was common, and lush. *S. nigrum* was also present, so we could compare – Green/dark stems; spreading/more upright; persistent calyx almost as large as fruits/smaller; fruits white-streaked/plain green.

Other frequent weeds we were passing were very large *Chenopodium album* (Fat Hen), *Urtica urens* (Annual Nettle) and *Anchusa arvensis* (Bugloss)

At a corner of the track marked by *Malva neglecta* (Dwarf Mallow) we found the first of many *Geranium pusillum* (Small-flowered Crane's-bill). We then turned in beside a crop of beetroot behind which we came across some treasures, heralded by plentiful *Spergula arvensis* (Corn Spurrey) There was *Misopates orontium* (Weasel's Snout) in full flower, copious *Stachys arvensis* (Field Woundwort), *Thlaspi arvense* (Field Penny-cress) in both flower and fruit; *Lamium amplexicaule* (Henbit Dead-nettle) and *Papaver dubium* (Long-headed Poppy)

A feature of many places was the riotous growth of *Persicaria lapathifolia* (Pale Persicaria) sometimes so thickly growing it looked like the crop, not the weed. Yet again, its close and smaller relative *P. persicaria* (Redshank) was often growing with it, so we could compare.

A couple of exotic grasses were collected as we tramped back to our picnics, which were calling some

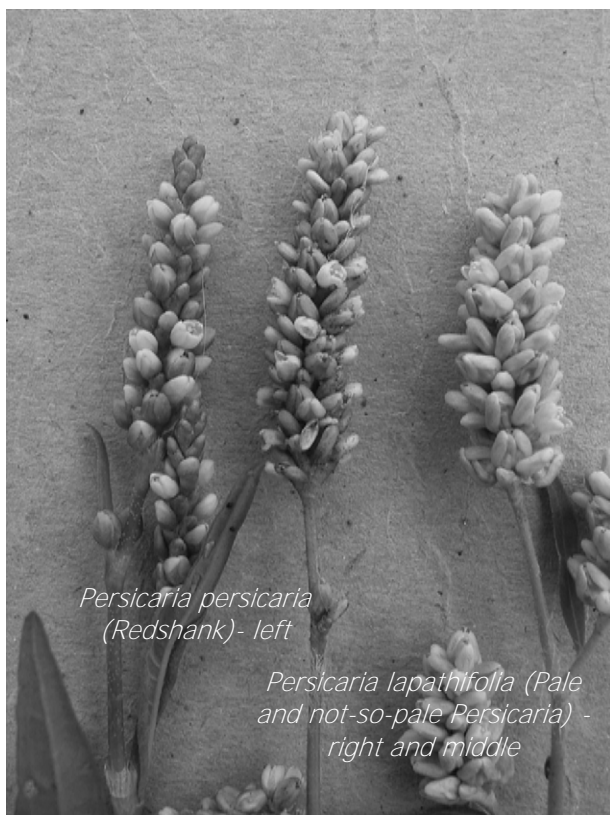


Field Penny-cress

of us by then. The grasses were identified over lunch as *Setaria pumila* and *Ceratochloa carinata*. They had been growing with fodder maize; it seemed a waste to be growing maize in such special and productive soil.

We potted about a bit more in the afternoon, but found no further excitements unless you count *Medicago arabica* (Spotted Medick). We had seen only one real hot spot, though amazement everywhere, but we covered very little of the available ground, proceeding at our usual pace. I wonder what else there is. Corn marigold has been reported, but I only found an escaped *Calendula*.

Rosemary Duckett



Ascension Islands Flora

- a different view of aliens

The conventional view of introduced species is that they are undesirable. I picked up this note in New Scientist recently about the flora of Ascension Island. In 1835 Darwin called in there and noted an almost naked island 'of ruinous rocks'. This is hardly surprising since it is a volcano on the mid Atlantic ridge formed one million years ago and presumably no flora at all. Hooker later noted there were a few endemics but suggested to the Naval garrison there that a few trees might be a good thing. The sailors enlivened their time with a great bonanza of tree planting. 200 species came from South Africa and Kew sent 700 packets of seed. A new forest of exotic species soon flourished; the Green Mountain. That cloud forest, entirely man-made, of an aggregate of species, has been declared a resounding success. The endemics are still there!

Barbara Last

Reference: The accidental rainforest, Fred Pearce, New Scientist issue 2465, 18 September 2004

Orchids on the Move



Heath Spotted Orchid

To the north and west of the wooded area known as Bird's Marsh, Chippenham, a shallow valley runs eastward towards Jacksoms Lane. More years ago than I care to remember the fields in the valley near the Marsh were never cultivated, as was the one overlooking the valley on the eastern side of the wood.

This field did not reach the valley bottom but had a hedgerow across it from west to east. When my family were young, we used to picnic there and we discovered a small pond, nearly dry in summer, which was held up by the hedge bank. There were numerous orchids growing in and around the marshy area. The majority were Common Spotted Orchids, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, but I noticed that some were paler, their lips were a different shape and covered with small spots, rather than the dark loops of the Common Spotted Orchids.

And there the situation remained for several years, until I met a local botanist and mentioned the orchids to her. She said that the pale flowers were just a variety of the Common Spotted Orchid, and that was that. Then in 1980, David Lang's first orchid book was published, and the photographs in it set me wondering again. I immediately went to photograph the flowers, only to find that the field had been ploughed and the pond destroyed. Fortunately a few plants were still

struggling in the long grass right against the hedge, so I got my picture. David Lang confirmed my suspicion that these were indeed Heath Spotted Orchids.

Then disaster struck again, the farmer decided to take out the hedgerow completely, and the site was destroyed. However I searched the area and in a boggy patch of the field to the west of the track which leads to Jacksoms Lane I found a few Heath Spotted Orchids, *D. maculata* subsp. *ericetorum*. These persisted for three years, and then disappeared, for no apparent reason. I thought that this was the end of Heath Spotted Orchids in the district.

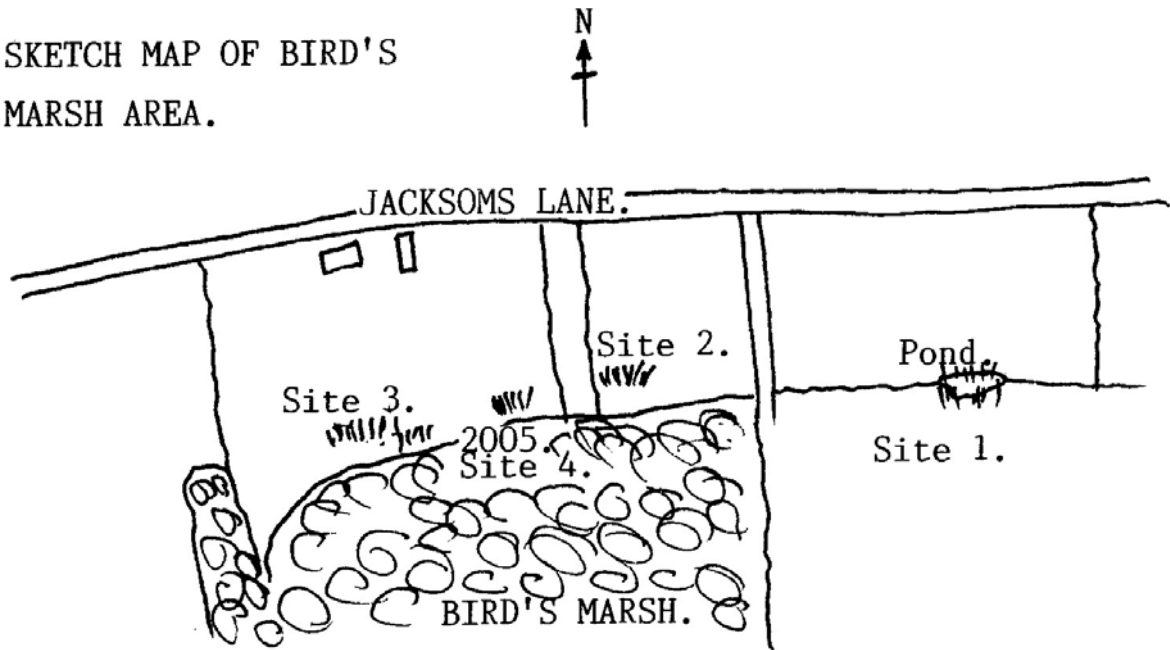
The following year, 1984, a friend told me that he had noticed a group of orchids in a field near the head of the valley, right under the edge of the Marsh. I was delighted to find Heath Spotted Orchids again. As in the original colony there were several Common Spotted Orchid plants. These hybridized with the Heath Spotted Orchids, and as the hybrid is sterile they have gone, leaving the colony almost pure Heath Spotted Orchid. It has produced some lovely varieties, from the usual pale pink ground colour with numerous dark dots or broken loops, to pure white albino specimens. The lip is usually broad, with a small central lobe, but this can vary considerably.

This colony has persisted, fluctuating in size from about 50 plants to the present day some 500 plus.



Heath Spotted Orchid - albino

SKETCH MAP OF BIRD'S
MARSH AREA.



Heath Spotted Orchid - typical

This year, 2005, the orchids are on the move again, new groups appearing further down the valley in the lowest part of the field. One of these was pale yellow in colour, and another white, with beautiful dark markings. The story continues.

John Tucker

Jackson's Lane is at ST 917 760

Residential Visit to South -West France May 21 – 27 2006

We are planning a group visit to the Lot-et-Garonne region of France next May; an area particularly rich in orchids.

Jeremy and Jane Wood spent three days in the area in May 2005, whilst visiting Jeremy's niece, Phylida Sturdy, who has lived there for the past five years. During this time they managed to find no less than 20 species of orchid as well as other plants of note. Phylida is prepared to guide us to good sites and we also have contact with a local botanist, Monique Castex, who has written a book on the region's orchids and is prepared to spend some time with us.

The area is close to the town of Agen (sheet 79, Bordeaux-Montauban in the Michelin 1:200 000 series). We know of several gites in this area, which could provide accommodation for the party. The gites are let on a weekly basis – Saturday to Saturday, and prices would remain the same irrespective of how many days people wished to use them. Each gite has a mix of double and twin-bedded rooms but there is sufficient accommodation to allow people to have single occupancy of a room if they would prefer not to share. We would hope that those who are prepared to share a room would register their interest together. The cost of a room is anticipated to be in the range £110 - £170 depending on its size and number of occupants. Final costings can only be calculated when the numbers interested and number of rooms required are known. The gites have considerable grounds associated with them – available for the use of visitors - and as well as botanising, there is opportunity to visit the picturesque villages nearby as well as the Pech Merle cave (about 2 hours drive). Unlike some of our recent trips, there should be time for relaxation during our stay.

Breakfasts and lunches can be prepared at our gites, as can evening meals, if desired. There are several local restaurants in the area and we imagine that many people will be pleased to use these for most evening meals.

It is envisaged that most people will prefer to travel to France by air. The budget airline 'Flybe' operates from both Southampton and Bristol to Bergerac, which is about 1.5 hours drive from the accommodation. Timetables of flights for the period under consideration have yet to be produced but, judging by those of 2005, Saturday is not a convenient day to travel out. The times of flights on Sunday are much more convenient. Times of return flights on Saturday are much better and we would hope that most people would be prepared to stay for 6 nights. Travel arrangements must be made by the individual, rather than on behalf of the group. It will be necessary to hire vehicles for our use during the

week. Most hire companies restrict the age of drivers to whom they will lease cars and this may determine whether we travel by minibus or family sized cars. When the members of the group are known, it will be possible to arrange this more precisely. We will attempt to organise most guided visits to sites between Monday and Thursday.

In order to be able to secure the accommodation and make more detailed plans, it would be appreciated if those interested in joining the party could send the accompanying form to Pat within two weeks of the distribution of the newsletter. Numbers will be restricted and places allocated on a first come first served basis.

Please note the following:

- Accommodation will be booked on behalf of the group.
- Travel is the responsibility of the individual.
- Car hire will be arranged according to those willing / able to drive.
- Costs do not include travel (flights + vehicle hire), food.
- Travel insurance is the responsibility of the individual.

If you wish to register your interest in the residential visit to Lot-et-Garonne, please complete the enclosed form. Please do this only if you are reasonably sure that you will take up a place, otherwise you might prevent another person from attending and you will make planning very difficult indeed. I am happy to have a waiting list in case anyone should need to drop out.

Once these forms have been received, we will provide those interested with an update of plans for the trip. At this point we will request a substantial deposit to cover approx. 50% of accommodation costs and donations to local helpers. A full list of potential participants will be circulated so that individuals can group together to consider flights and possibly car hire too.

Pat Woodruffe

Highgrove House - Spring 2006

We have been offered another chance to visit the gardens of Highgrove, the home of HRH Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall. Only a few weeks advance notice of the invitation can be issued by the staff, which makes organisation difficult. I imagine a weekday to be the more probable, but have not been given any details. We are required to arrive as a group with a driver who will remain with the vehicle. I shall therefore suggest Chippenham as a meeting place from where we can hire a minibus.

If you would like to receive further details of this visit, as soon as I have them, please let me have your address, telephone number and, preferably, email. If I do not receive sufficient interest, I will cancel our request.

Pat Woodruffe

Chelsea Physic Gardens - Sunday 7th May 2006

Chelsea Physic Garden houses collections of plants, arranged as they were in the 17th century; the aim being the study and collect those species which exhibit healing properties. To an apothecary it is a collection of vital plants; to many others it is simply beds of weeds.

We have made a provisional arrangement for a tour of the garden on Sunday May 7th commencing at 2.00pm. The gardens open at this time and will close at 6.00pm. Teas and a gift shop will be open. The theme of the tour will be medicinal plants. Cost of entry and tour is £10.

It is necessary to prebook the visit and pay in advance, so please register your interest and send me a cheque (payable to Wiltshire Botanical Society) by November 1st.

Pat Woodruffe

Subscriptions

Firstly, thank you to the great majority of members who adjusted their standing orders or sent in the correct amount for our new subscription rate without reminder, and also to those who replied promptly when they were reminded!

However, over the last couple of years more and more members have forgotten to pay until late in the summer. Reminders have to be sent out, increasing our postage costs.

Perhaps it would be as well to remind you that for those paying by cash or by cheque, subscriptions fall due on January 1st annually and should be paid as soon as possible after that date, or at the very latest by the Annual General Meeting – a traditional time for many.

In future if reminders become necessary, receipts will not be sent out unless a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed with your cheque. We regret that we can no longer send out newsletters to members who have not paid by the end of August.

I hope this will clarify matters. May I suggest you make a note in your diary/organiser now – WBS subs Jan 1st 2006!

Gwyneth Yerrington, Treasurer

Wiltshire Rare Plant Register – an update

Work began late in 2004, and a small number of hard-working volunteers subsequently adopted a defined area (typically, a 10 km x 10 km OS grid square). During the 2005 recording season they attempted to re-find a number of old records (mostly 1995 or earlier) in their square, for a group of species that have been defined as either nationally or locally rare or scarce. Unfortunately for me, this list of species will now need to be revised again, to bring it in line with BSBI guidelines following revision of the JNCC's rare and scarce plants lists, which now very sensibly incorporate IUCN threat categories.

However, the summer's results are now flooding in, and I am very grateful for all of the legwork that people have put in so far. Several potential sources of funding for the WRPR have been identified, and now that the survey season is over again, I am resuming the task of writing the register. It is rather a slow process, hampered by full-time employment, so there will be ample opportunity for more recorders to get involved in 2006, in verifying records once more. If anyone is interested, please let me know.

Sharon Pilkington

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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:

Lesley Wallington
42 Ingram Road
Melksham
Wiltshire SN12 7JH

Subscriptions:

Ordinary Member----- £10.00 per year
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Wiltshire Botanical Society

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Future meetings

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

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Pat Woodruffe