

NEWSLETTER

Issue 28

Autumn 2006

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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Wednesday 22 March

Winter Twigs in Bentley Wood

Leaders: Pat Woodruffe and Graham Darrah

It had been an unusually cold, dry March. In the wood not one tree (bar Elder, a special case) had anything other than tightly clenched bud scales so "winter twigs" was an apt title for our day out. Ten of us, well wrapped up, gathered at the barn and among the nearest trees soon established that we usually knew a tree on sight by the general gizz, as the birders say, but unknown ones needed care and a lens to check for bud scales that had hairy edges (Field Maple) or were glabrous (Hawthorn) and so on. Pat had prepared a list of likely species with the salient features for us, which made things easier, and we were lucky to have Graham Darrah with us, a gentle and highly expert teacher, so we did some conifer identification as well. We spent some time by some young Birches – Silver? Downy? Hybrid? – but later saw that the wartiness of Silver Birch twigs is most distinctive but the pubescence of Downy Birch is less easy to see. A Wayfaring tree had some of us temporarily puzzled, as did a clump of Aspen.

A short detour took us to one of the deer-exclusion areas, installed to see the effect of no browsing over several years. Inside the fence there was ample flourishing green bramble; outside every bramble leaf – every single one – had been nibbled off, and the plants looked sickly.

We were reminded of pictures of the rabbit-proof fence in Australia.

Back at the barn was astonishment. Pat had prepared a most delicious and generous lunch for us; piping hot soup, bread, cheese, and fruit. With the warmth of the stove we had a very jolly party.

After lunch we settled down to our homework with bunches of twigs that people had brought, and books. This was harder than the 20 or so species we had seen in the wood. The Willows were especially tricky and we concluded that in some cases identification was not possible with twigs alone. It was good to compare the two common Oaks properly and there was a branch of Turkey Oak as well, also Blackthorn, Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn. Graham had brought two types of Walnut with their curious compartmentalised pith and there were other interesting twigs to look at.

From the happy sound of us you might imagine that Pat had slipped a little extra into the soup, but no, it was just the chatter of warm, dry, well-fed botanists enjoying themselves

Rosemary Duckett



Monday 17 April 2006

Rodney Stoke National Nature Reserve and Blackmoor Reserve

Leader -Sharon Pilkington

Fourteen of us spent an exciting and rewarding day in an area that Sharon knows well.

We started at Rodney Stoke in the English Nature Reserve on the edge of Mendip. As usual the first excitement was where we parked the cars, a simply huge early purple orchid (*Orchis mascula*) not yet in flower. Sharon had seen the huge flower spike last year.

The reserve is in two parts with access, apart from the footpath, by permit (these are easy to obtain from English Nature). We went into Big Stoke, an ancient woodland which was felled for World War One. (Small Stoke suffered the same for World War Two.) The wood is extensive and runs down the slope of Mendip. The bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) were only just beginning to show blue but the wood anemones (*Anemone nemorosa*) were in full flower as was Town Hall Clock (*Adoxa moschatellina*). We did not find the Wild Daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) that Sharon has seen on one of her visits but we enjoyed the Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*), which was relatively widespread. We also saw Broad Buckler Fern





Molly stirring up the Wood Ants



(*Saxifraga tridactylites*), Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*), Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox* subsp. *britannicus*), Vernal Whitlow Grass (*Erophila verna*) and

(*Dryopteris dilatata*), Madder (*Rubia peregrina*) and Nettle Leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*).

We were not disappointed in our quest for Purple Gromwell (*Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum*) – firstly some of last year's spikes with hard white seeds then large patches of both the old spikes and of new growth. We did not see flowers but saw enough to realise that this would be really spectacular in a few weeks time.

At the base of the hill we saw some very old small leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*) stools and in the centre of one of these toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*). The wood has Small Leaved Lime, which we saw and Wild Service (*Sorbus torminalis*), which we did not see. The Small Leaved Lime was showing the purplish new growth when we looked back over the wood

We climbed up through a field with wonderful views back over the edge of Mendip and across the Levels. A steeper woodland area brought us to a grassy knoll with a good variety of species including Spring Sedge (*Carex caryophyllaea*), Rue-leaved Saxifrage

Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*).

We then explored the area near Charterhouse that has



Hutchinsia - small, but special

been an area of lead mining. At Ubley the limestone has *rakes*, exposures from the mining and *gruffy-ground* from the waste. We found Little Mouse-ear (*Cerastium semidecandrum*) and were delighted also to find Hutchinsia (*Hornungia petraea*) in full flower

We moved to Blackmoor and quickly found Alpine Penny-cress (*Teesdalia caerulescens*) and Water Horse-tail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) in the reed beds.

This is a fascinating area with habitats not found in Wiltshire. We all learned a great deal and also spent a very enjoyable Bank Holiday. Our thanks go to Sharon for a really valuable day.

Sonia Heywood



Getting down to Rue-leaved Saxifrage



A carpet of Herb Paris

Saturday 29 April 2006

Collingbourne Woods

Leader - John Moon

Joint Meeting with Hampshire Wildlife Trust

Seventeen members of the two groups joined John for this walk around Collingbourne Woods, which is on clay-with-flints. The site has been wooded since about 1300 AD and although managed by the Forestry Commission and largely replanted, retains an ancient woodland ground flora. We were expecting to see some gems and were not disappointed, although, because of the late season, the bluebells were only just coming into bloom.

As we entered the wood and walked between a conifer plantation and the semi-natural woodland edge of oak, ash and hazel, we were pleased to see a very large stand of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*). Other indicators of ancient woodland present in this part of the wood included Yellow Archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*), Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*). Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), which is associated with moist woodlands and absent from dry woods on chalk, was abundant in places. We also saw a variety of typical woodland plants including Wood Sedge (*Carex*

sylvatica), Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*), Giant Fescue (*Festuca gigantea*) and Common and Early Dog-Violets (*Viola riviniana* and *V. reichenbachiana*). Even in the conifer plantation, the trees were sufficiently well spaced to allow the ground flora to flourish.

Further on the conifers gave way to beech plantation and Solomon's-Seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) was quite abundant and widespread. Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) was locally dominant. Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) and Wood Millet (*Milium effusum*), both of which are associated with ancient woodlands, were also noted, as was Soft Shield Fern (*Polystichum setiferum*).

After another stand of conifers, we walked through a further beech plantation with carpets of bluebells promising a fine display. Here we were taken to a very extensive patch of Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*), one of the highlights of the visit. Some plants were just coming into flower. Wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*) and Twayblade (*Listera ovata*) were also seen in this part of the wood. Early Purple Orchids (*Orchis mascula*) were in flower a short distance away.

As we walked along a shady path between pine and beech plantations, we found Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), usually associated with acid soils, but occurring in calcareous areas on clay-with-flints.

Returning to our cars along an open, sunny ride in an

area of quite recent felling and replanting, we were delighted to see leaves and capsules of Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*). There were also leaves of Nettle-leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*), Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) and Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*). The hybrid between Wood and Water Aven (*Geum x intermedium*) was in flower. Holly Blue and Peacock butterflies were flying in the spring sunshine. Looking

at the lush spring growth along the ride, one member (who shall remain nameless) commented, "It makes me want to be a cow!"

So we saw all the interesting plants highlighted in the programme and many more. Thanks very much to John for a very successful and enjoyable visit.

Anne Appleyard



Sunday 7 May 2006

Chelsea Physic Garden

Leo met a small group of us by the statue of Sir Hans Sloane which stood above us on a plinth in the middle of the garden. She (Leo) was to be our whistle-stop guide for the next hour or so, and was relieved to know she didn't have to explain such words as monocotyledon. Sir Hans was the man who started The British Museum with his own collection of artefacts, and he was also benefactor of the Physic Garden, which was started in the 17th century. The garden was founded by the Apothecary Society, whose coat of arms adorns the gates. The god Apollo is seen killing the wyvern of disease, and above is a rhinoceros, possibly linked to the usefulness of the horn as an antidote to poison - or as an aphrodisiac.

In the centre is what is said to be the oldest rock garden in existence; it hasn't changed since the 18th century, and as well as plants, it contains bits of tufa from Iceland, and stone that fell from the Tower of London.

Leo led us to the shade (yes, there was sun) of a yew - probably *Taxus baccata* - and explained that the garden was set out in four sections - monocotyledons being the first corner we visited.

The whole garden was a reminder of free thinkers of the age - there were special historical beds that contained plants either imported by, or named after, people who had been involved in the development of botanical study or exploration in those early days.

These included:



Sir Hans Sloane - photo Jane Brown

- 1 Philip Miller, who sponsored ships to go to America to collect plants - the Physic Garden was where many plants started their life away from their native soil.
- 2 William Curtis, who started Curtis' Botanical Magazine there, Kew having now taken it over.
- 3 Joseph Banks, who was on the Endeavour with Captain Cook, and a lead in the Royal Society for 40 years. It was his idea that it was the state's responsibility to fund scientific research - he was eventually 'headhunted' by William III and went to Kew.

All around were fine examples of trees, including a flowering Dove-Tree or Handkerchief Tree (*Davidia involucrata*) - we were reminded of the connection to Père David - and foxglove tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*). Others we inspected were ginkgos (*Ginkgo biloba*), male and female - these don't bear fruit for many years. When they do, the fruit has an unpleasant smell, the nut inside has a medicinal value, and the dried leaves have an effect on the oxygenation of the blood. A



The oldest rock garden in the world - photo Jane Brown



A Wardian case - photo Jane Brown

member of our group told us of a friend who has these regularly on breakfast cereal - a precautionary measure....

Two deciduous conifers were compared - a tall swamp cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), which came from Missouri around 1700, and a Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) which was thought to be extinct until 1941 when a Chinese forester found one in a remote area, and the news travelled to a professor in Peking. Eventually an expedition went from the United States, and hey presto, the tree was 'rediscovered'.

The tree records at the garden were lost in 1946 as the result of a bomb, so much information has been lost.

Other records are kept in the library, not open to the public, where conservation work is in progress.

Books there include Fortune's travel books - he was famous for taking tea from China to India. Wardian cases, like mini wooden greenhouses, were invented to transport 23,000 tea plants, and these were to become useful for transporting plants of all kinds.

An *Index Seminum* is also held (since 1683) - the garden accepts and offers seeds of all kinds to other Botanic Gardens including those at Oxford.

Our last stop was the medicinal corner which was well

labelled. It reminded us that a plant with *officinalis* in the name is a plant that would have been sold 'neat' across the counter by apothecaries in medieval times. We saw a beautiful pink-flowered broad bean, extracts of which are used in the treatment of Parkinson's disease. Sweet Cicely (*Myrrhis odorata*) and deadly Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) grew side by side, reminding us of their similarities - misidentification not to be advised!

The new compost heaps are to be opened soon by Princess Alexandra.

Leo added that the main gates are only opened for two reasons - to admit royalty, or the manure lorry from Wellington Barracks - but not at the same time...

After the tour, some of the group enjoyed the interesting variety of cakes and tea on offer, and we celebrated Joy's birthday!

It was a beautiful afternoon and a thoroughly enjoyable visit, the garden providing a haven of peace in the midst of the metropolis.

There was much more to see, such as the fern house, various greenhouses, and plants from different areas of the world; despite being compact, the garden would warrant another visit.

Jane Brown

Wednesday 17 May 2006, morning

The Field between Turleigh and Bradford- on-Avon

Gwyneth Yerrington and the owner, Pam Slocombe, guided five of us round the field. The site contained an old limestone quarry and probable Roman remnants.

The colour blue dominated the steepest part of the meadow, with dense masses of *Veronica chamaedrys* (Germander Speedwell). This changed above to yellow, from three species of buttercup. Further on, the violet-tinged blue of *Glechoma hederacea* (Ground Ivy, disliked by the horses) was the main colour in the last tract of the meadow.

We spent a quarter of an hour on six Geranium (Cranesbill) species, including *Geranium columbinum*, the Long-stalked Cranesbill, but the varied flora included a good range of genera. A small selection of examples seen and scrutinised were *Ballota*, *Carex*, *Cirsium*, *Cynoglossum*, *Daphne*, *Fumaria*, *Juglans*, *Ornithogalum*, *Quercus*, *Sherardia*, *Tamus*, *Valerianella*, *Verbascum*, *Verbena*, *Veronica* and *Vicia*. Spurge Laurel (*Daphne laureola*) was quite common. The natural seeding of Walnut (*Juglans regia*) intrigued me; seedlings were progressing to saplings. Horses reject Hound's tongue, *Cynoglossum officinale*, which was so common that, along with nettles, control had been necessary. It was spreading in grassy and Ground Ivy areas, and was not just found near badger holes.

We found some new plants on the site. Towards the end of the meeting we noted dense masses of unusual leaves in a semi-shaded area, forming a turf. *Ornithogalum Pyrenaicum* (Bath Asparagus or Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem) had been known previously, but it was *Ornithogalum umbellatum*, subspecies *angustifolium*, the native form of Star-of-Bethlehem.

Thanks to Pam Slocombe and Gwyneth for a very pleasant half-day.

Jack Oliver

Wednesday 17 May 2006, afternoon

Hazelbury Common, Wadswick

The morning, grey and overcast, ended with rain and the afternoon continued wet and was really a non-event. John Presland did brave the elements but somehow we managed to miss one another!

I thought that being there I may as well look to see what had opened since my last visit (a week ago) and was rewarded by the sight of a good number of Green-winged Orchid and a dozen or so Common Twayblade. The Cowslips were almost over but Horseshoe Vetch was just opening and there was the occasional blue of Common Milkwort, so not an entirely wasted visit.

Later in the year there are other orchids sometimes to be found growing here, including Spotted, Fragrant and Bee, as well as various knapweeds and scabious, Felwort and Yellow-wort amongst others.

If you have an interest in butterflies this can also be a good place to see several species, including Chalkhill Blue.

I concluded the afternoon with a visit to Chapel Plaister itself, originally a resting place for pilgrims on their journey to the shrine of St. Joseph of Arimathea at Glastonbury. The chapel faces the Common and is now open on summer Wednesday afternoons. If you enjoy flowers, butterflies and historic buildings this is a good place to visit.

Gwyneth Yerrington

Wiltshire Rare Plant Register – an update

I'm delighted to report that recording activity for the register has been tremendous this year, with a small army of recorders really getting their hands dirty. As in 2005, some people 'adopted' an area and diligently attempted to re-find old records, with varying success. Many new records have been made along the way as a by-product, which is most welcome. Others got involved with some of the 'square-bashing' events, such as the visits to Martin Down and Pewsey Downs in June. I would like to say a big 'thank you' to everyone who gave their time and expertise so willingly.

Two large areas that I had been particularly concerned about because there were relatively few records at all were the Defence Training Estate on Salisbury Plain, and the Cotswold Water Park area in VC7. All three of the Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA) conservation groups have undertaken survey work this year for the RPR, and some excellent new finds have been made across the plain. Gareth Harris of the Cotswold Water Park (CWP) Society was very helpful and supportive, escorting several visits to parts of the CWP for recording purposes, and supplying me with comprehensive data from an aquatic macrophyte survey that was undertaken in 2004. At the moment charophytes (or stoneworts) are outside the scope of the RPR, but that could be reviewed in the future, given the new data.

So what now? I am still receiving data from some people, and once I have that I will start extracting sites and species data from the database. This is definitely a winter job! I plan to publish the register in spring 2007, but hope to keep up the recording momentum next year, for the 2nd edition.

Sharon Pilkington

Dave Green – An Appreciation

After *The Wiltshire Flora* was published in 1993 a group of us who had been inspired by Dave founded the Wiltshire Botanical Society with him as the first Chairman. He taught us so much but always emphasised the sheer pleasure of botanising and led us on our first 'holiday' to the Gower.

Having moved to Wales he has left the Committee. His legacy is that we now have a flourishing Society; thank you Dave.

Joy Newton



Dave Green

The committee would like to offer Dave life membership of the Wiltshire Botanical Society in recognition of his support and guidance since the society was founded.



21 to 27 May 2006

Lot-et-Garonne, Southern France

This was the first trip abroad for the Botanical Society. We stayed for a week in countryside which was both like and unlike Wiltshire: a flat limestone plateau divided by gentle fertile valleys, with attractive white stone farmhouses and narrow, hedge-less roads. Surprisingly, there was only the occasional small vineyard.

Jeremy Wood had arranged interesting visits and outstanding guides.

The plants we found ranged from familiar friends to the completely new; our Bee Orchid was fairly common, but there were also groups like the *Serapias* orchids, which are not even represented in the UK. Some, like Meadow Clary, were common and flourishing in this part of the world, but are rare back home in Wiltshire.

Good food, wine and company featured, and also a little sightseeing. Some members have written short pieces to give a flavour of the visit.

Richard Aisbitt

Oddments

It was startling to see Lizard Orchids and Meadow Clary as common, disregarded flowers of verge and hayfield. On the other hand Monique Castex, a notable botanist who guided us on several trips, once proudly



Rosemary attacks a chicken

showed us a small patch of Creeping Jenny that she had found.

Monique tended to introduce plants to us by telling us, first, how they should be cooked and eaten

The tops of the rolling low hills were all flattened into wide plateaux where exceptionally clean crops of carrots and sugar beet were being grown for seed, not for their roots

Among more mundane stores provided to tide us over our first evening was a gigantic homemade loaf of bread and a basket of proper scratching-hen eggs. The loaf provided breakfast toast and picnic lunches for seven of us for several days

Our average age was high, about 68, in spite of the comparative youngsters Sharon and Gilles. This was belied by our energy, keenness and, most of the time for most of us, our stamina. In this matter Jeremy must be especially mentioned. He was the original instigator of our trip and he and Pat had done a great deal to get the show on the road, but for Jeremy, at 85, no walk was too long nor bank too steep to see and photograph, for instance, the huge, spectacular orchid *Limodorum abortivum*.

Rosemary Duckett

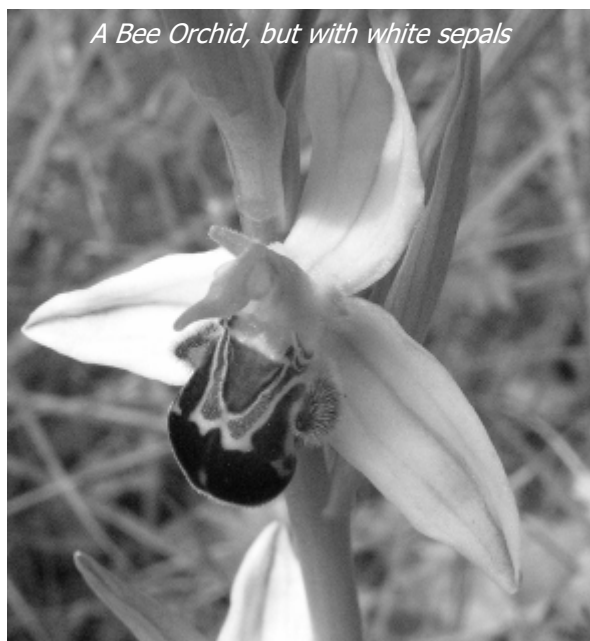
Monday pm

After our picnic lunch in Phylida's lovely garden she took us to a large lake and laughingly told us that the walk was 40 minutes but at least 2 hours for botanists and she was right.

We had our first sightings of many orchids, including Woodcock Orchid (*Ophrys scolopax*), Bee Orchid (*O. apifera*) and Greater Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*); all these in great profusion. We saw one Narrow-leaved Helleborine (*Cephalanthera longifolia*) still out, several Red Helleborine (*C. rubra*) very rare at home and a great treat. Long-lipped Serapias (*Serapias vomeracea*) and Lizard Orchid (*Himantoglossum hircinum*) added to the delights.

The butterflies were spectacular and in profusion. Adonis Blue, Clouded Yellow, Pale Clouded Yellow, and many fritillaries were enjoying the sun.

We had our first sighting of an Ascalaphid, called *Libelloides coccajus*. It is an insect like a moth with



A Bee Orchid, but with white sepals

transparent wings; we saw them most days, but not until about mid-day as the sun warmed the air.

Back near the cars another treat was found, a patch of exquisite *Aristolochia* sp. (Dutchman's Pipe) in the ditch.

Off to the supermarket for provisions then to a wonderful, really French meal at the Station Café in Agen

Joy Newton

On our last afternoon (Friday May 26th) Phylida guided us to the little village of St Robert, about a 10 minute drive from the gite. Here we met up once again with Monique who led us on a rather special walk across private land. The particular objective of the walk was to show us two species of orchid that we had not seen earlier in the week, but as before in this corner of France there was plenty of botanical interest apart from orchids. For instance the *Ornithogalum* that some of the party had puzzled over the day before was identified by Monique as *O. pyrenaicum*, in other words our old friend Bath Asparagus. A Euphorbia that bore a superficial resemblance to *E. platyphyllus* was named for us as *E. verrucosa*, with fruits covered in cylindrical warts. An attractive Geranium with purplish flowers turned out to be *G. sylvaticum* (Wood Cranesbill). Descending a path that led into woodland, Monique was able to show us a group of *Epipactis microphylla*, a distinctly rare orchid that she had only found here two years ago. Although the flowers on most of the plants were over it was possible to find one or two that were worth photographing. Not a spectacular orchid, its real interest lay in its rarity. Only 20 - 30 yards away were some tall spikes of *Limodorum arbortivum*. This was a distinct bonus, as we had not expected to see it on this walk. Descending further we came out of the wood into a lush meadow at the bottom of the valley, and here

were quantities of the second orchid that Monique had promised to show us, namely *Orchis laxiflora*. These were in fine condition, and just right for photography. Before turning back, Monique pointed out two plants of *Gymnadenia conopsea*, not yet in flower but readily identifiable from their general appearance. These four orchids, added to those seen earlier in the week, brought the tally for the trip to 27 species. Back at St Robert, Monique generously gave us a copy of a booklet, *The Deciduous Trees of Lot-et-Garonne and their Insects*. This is beautifully illustrated with Monique's drawings, and she has also written a good part of the text. It is sure to be of interest to members of the Society.

Jeremy Wood

Saturday am

Woke up thinking our fantastic holiday was over and we would be off to the airport, a non-botany day.

The first surprise was a quick trip to see some of Sharon's finds from yesterday, *Adonis annua* (Pheasants Eye) and Shepherds Needle (*Scandix pecten-veneris*) in a field boundary.

Even more awaited us; the plane being delayed we had lots of time for botanising in the grass and trees around Bergerac airport (a slight contrast to Heathrow). Subterranean Clover (*Trifolium subterraneum*, Common Cornsalad (*Valerianella locusta*) which is sold in supermarkets now, and Brown Knapweed (*Centaurea jacea*) which is rare in England.

A great ending to a memorable holiday made possible by the research and organisation of Jeremy Wood and Pat Woodruffe. A very grateful thank you

Joy Newton



A new one to us, Leuzia conferta

Monday 12 June 2006

Martin Down National Nature Reserve

Rare Plant Register Survey

About seven volunteers turned up to help record the rare chalk grassland flora of the VC8 part of Martin Down. Perhaps the scorching temperatures and cloudless skies deterred a few others from venturing out, and I certainly don't blame them. It wasn't a day for strenuous activity, as even walking very far was hard work. Linda Smith, English Nature's assistant site manager turned up to help, and very kindly transported some of us in her Land Rover uphill to the Bokerley Ditch at Blagdon Hill, while two other groups went round to start their surveys from the car park on the main A354 road.

Martin Down is an extensive area of old and very species-rich chalk downland. One of the most outstanding features of the reserve, from a botanical perspective, is the sheer abundance of Dwarf Sedge, which is dominant or abundant across large areas of turf, especially in the vicinity of the Bokerley Ditch. Here too, we found plenty of Field Fleawort in flower. Marjorie Waters was delighted to find the distinctive seed-heads and leaves of Pasque Flower in what we thought might be a new site in the reserve (it is also known on the Dorset VC9 side of the Bokerley Ditch). However, Linda soon put us right, and it was back to the searching. Most of us also found Greater Butterfly-orchids and Burnt Orchids. Linda also showed us the colony of Mountain Everlasting, looking very healthy and appearing to be increasing in extent, and an area where Adder's-tongue has been recorded. However, we could find no trace of it in the long vegetation.

Linda then put a few of us to work to try to find Man Orchid in an area where it has been seen in the past, but has not been found for a few years. Unfortunately, despite our searches, it remained elusive.

The blazing sun and heat defeated all of us by early afternoon, but it was a wonderful day, and a chance to see this fantastic site at its peak.

Thank you to all who helped out. I have passed our records on to English Nature.

Sharon Pilkington

Saturday 17 June 2006

Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve

Rare Plant Register Survey



Warm sunny weather and promotion courtesy of both WBS and Plantlife brought volunteers out in force, with more than twenty people arriving from as far afield as London. All were keen to help re-survey this wonderful chalk downland site for rarities for the forthcoming Wiltshire Plant Register, and we were fortunate enough to have Rob Wolstenholme, English Nature's site manager with us for a while. He was able to introduce the NNR to those who were unfamiliar with it, and to explain why it is such a special place, as well as to suggest good places to search. We split into four or five mixed groups, each armed with at least one good



botanist and a hand-held GPS unit to record OS grid references.

Because the reserve is so large, there was more than enough to keep everyone busy, and a certain air of competition developed between at least two of the groups, with each vying to record more rarities than the other. The hot sunshine was tempered a little by a pleasant breeze, and everyone enjoyed themselves (I think) and made some excellent records along the way.



Pretty in pink: Sainfoin

Most of us were lucky enough to see many of the specialities of the site, including Burnt Orchid, Lesser Butterfly-orchid, Bastard Toadflax and Early Gentian. The Field Fleaworts had been pushed fast through flowering by the high heat of the preceding fortnight, but it was still encouraging to see so many, typically associated with the archaeological features, as they are at so many sites. Around rabbit burrows and a badger sett, we found plenty of Hound's-tongue, and were lucky enough to spot some early-flowering Frog Orchids, again on archaeological remains.

Thanks to everyone who helped.

Sharon Pilkington

Thursday, 22 June 2006

Cloatley Meadows

Leaders: - Richard and Judy Gosnell

This is a large nature reserve belonging to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, 77 acres of flat Oxford clay and thus damp in the ditches and in the dips of the ridge and furrow system. All the fields are large and some are still grazed; the ungrazed ones were glorious. Our pleasure was not so much the hunting down of rarities but the joy of wandering through rich meadows under a wide summer sky. We even had a flock of swifts zooming round us hawking for insects just a couple of feet above the grass instead of their usual great height. The most floriferous meadow was a magnificent mix of colours and forms and it was the overall effect, rather than individual species, that was so impressive. There was plentiful Betony, and the showy, wide-rayed form of the Black Knapweed, both exactly the same colour; Meadow Vetchling and Bird's-foot-trefoils; Dropwort and Ox-eye Daisies; greeny-yellow Pepper Saxifrage. There were plenty of different sedges to be found and everywhere the grasses were in full glorious flower. Best of all, we thought, were the masses of Tufted Hair-grass, *Deschampsia cespitosa*, - betraying underground soggyiness. They were tall, graceful, and forming a silvery-purple haze in the slight breeze; really lovely

We did some dipping in one of the ponds, checking out the *Potamogeton (natans)*, in flower) and the *Lemna (trislca)*

Perhaps for the first time a majority of us had GPS gadgets, some new or newish, so there was quite a lot of comparing, learning and cross checking going on.

Altogether a perfect way to spend a glorious summer's morning

Rosemary Duckett.

Thursday 22 June 2006, afternoon

Blakehill Farm Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Reserve

Leaders: Richard and Judy Gosnell

We followed Richard and Judy Gosnell from Cloatley to Blakehill for our picnic amongst the Yellow Oat Grass, where two more members joined us.

Blakehill was a World War 2 airfield, very important in the run-up to D-Day. The Arnhem landings were launched from here and many wounded servicemen were evacuated to here. Dakotas and gliders of RAF 233 Squadron and 437 Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force flew very many sorties and there is a memorial at one corner of the site.

In 1963 Blakehill became a Radio Listening Post as part of GCHQ (of Cheltenham). In 1997, when it was acquired by the WWT they faced an enormous challenge; at 240 hectares it was the largest lowland hay meadow restoration project in the UK. Quite a challenge!

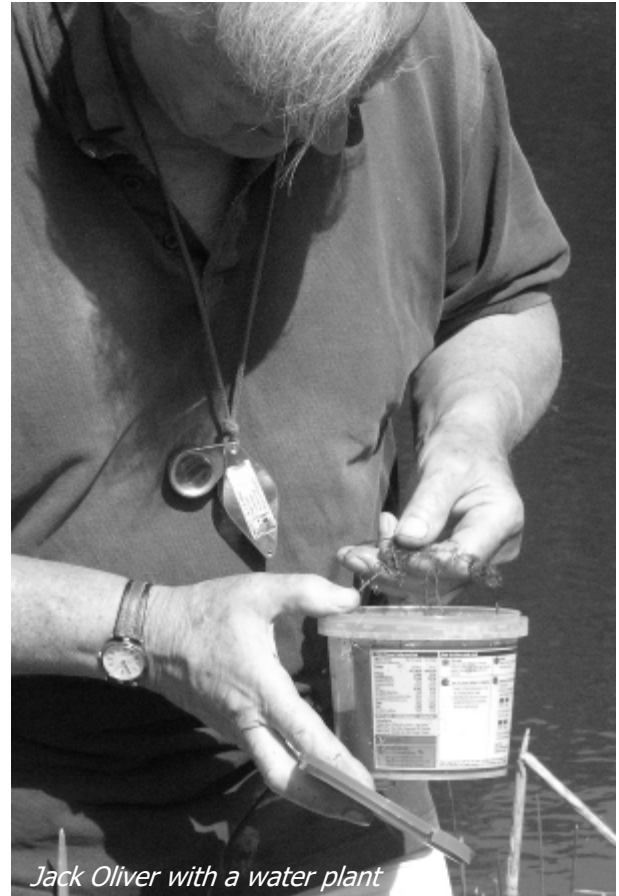
They are partway there. Although not as floristically diverse as the morning venue at Cloatley great strides have been made. Fences have been erected to accommodate the cattle which are crucial to the recovery of the habitat. Three breeds are used for precision grazing, Belted Galloways, Shorthorn & Liung (which are a cross between Shorthorn and Highland Cattle). We saw evidence of their effectiveness. Some fields had the occasional common spotted orchid, plenty of Pepper Saxifrage, Common Knapweed and Oxeye Daisies. The grasses and sedges were diverse and stunningly beautiful swaying in the breeze, with small blue damselflies darting around. A shallow pond had been dug where dragonflies skimmed, and there were Swifts and Swallows, House Martins and Skylarks, lots of butterflies and fantastic views for miles around; a very rewarding afternoon, thanks to Richard and Judy

Joy Newton

Sunday 16 July 2006, morning

Lower Moor Farm

Leader: Martin Buckland



Jack Oliver with a water plant

On a very pleasant morning around fifteen of us met to look at the newly acquired Wiltshire Trust reserve immediately adjacent to Clattinger Farm. Martin Buckland, the reserve warden showed us around, concentrating in particular on the edges of Mallard and Swallow Lakes. These old gravel pits are now home to numerous species of plants as well as an impressive array of dragonflies and other insects. The brambles developing on the south-facing banks are excellent nectar sources, so making this a five-star residence.

Our first stop along the banks revealed two species of Equisetum: Water Horsetail *E. fluviatile* and Marsh Horsetail *E. palustre* as well as Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustre*. We then walked through some tall pasture onto a promontory. Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, Hard Rush *J. inflexus*, False Fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*, Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca* and Common Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* were common here with Upright Hedge-parsley *Torilis japonica*, Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia*, Hemp Agrimony *Filipendula ulmaria*, Hoary Willowherb *Epilobium parviflorum* (easily identified using the keys which Ken Adams has



kindly offered us) and Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus* growing amongst them. We were delighted to find Grey Club-rush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* at the water's edge: freshly flowering material showed without doubt that there were only two styles. In the water Jack was able to find Spiked Water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, Nuttall's Waterweed *Elodea nuttallii* and *Chara aspera* var *aspera*. He comments as follows 'This is not very common and is one of the smaller charophytes which the 1986 BSBI book does not give as occurring in Wilts. It is abundant in the shallower waters of Mallard Lake but may be slowly giving way to *Elodea nuttallii*, which is dominant in the deeper waters. I think it is the perennial form, which is only rarely (sexually) fertile – in contrast to the Danish populations. The orange antheridia (which I carelessly called fruits) measured 0.6mm in diameter and the clumps I pulled up were all male plants'.

The dragonflies and damselflies were by now both numerous and interesting. Two damselflies were easily spotted; The Common Blue and Blue Tailed - the body of the latter is mainly black and its tip a bright blue. Much more difficult to see is the Emerald Damselfly – the only one which sits with its wings open. Dragonflies included the Black-tailed Skimmer, Brown Hawker, Emperor and both Common and Ruddy Darter.

Wandering along the banks we were able to spot several more plants of interest as well as further populations of some of those already mentioned. Amongst them were Corn Mint *Mentha arvensis*, Remote Sedge *Carex remota* and Grey Sedge *C. divulsa*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Toad Rush *J. bufonius*, Curled Dock *Rumex crispus*, Wood Dock *R. sanguineus*, Clustered Dock *R. conglomeratus* and a hybrid *R. x ruhmeri*.

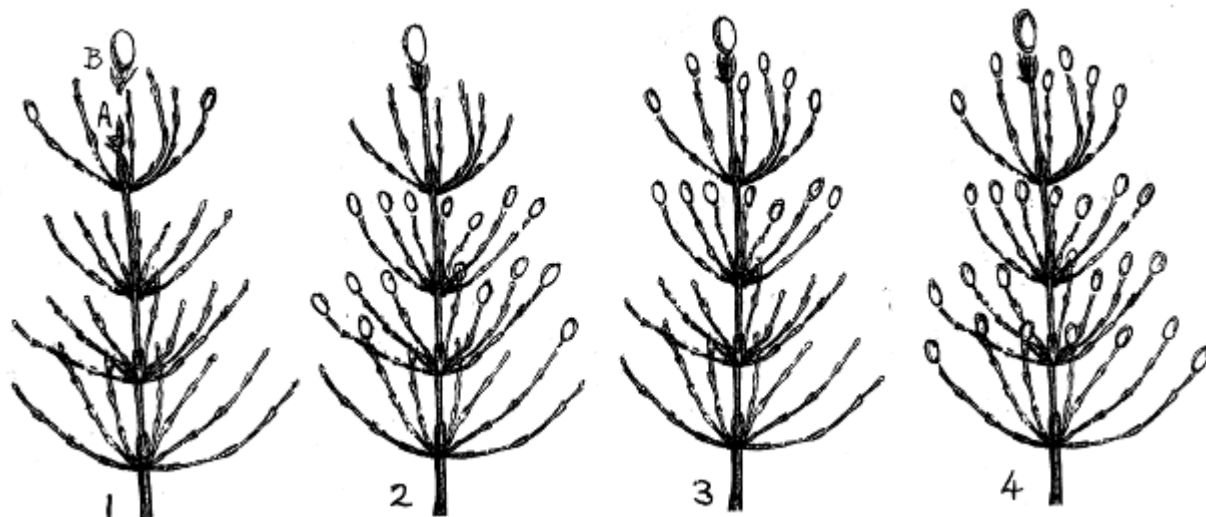
In Swallow Lake we saw Water Plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* in flower and also Purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*. Wild onion / Crow Garlic (*Allium*

vineale) attracted our attention because of the numerous bulbils and lack of flowers making up the umbel. Finally, on our return walk, we noted several plants of *Equisetum palustre* with numerous fertile branches arranged in whorls as well as the fully developed cone on the main stem. Jack, together with Malcolm Storey, wrote an article on this variant, called a Polystachion (see BSBI News Sept. 1996 No. 73).

Our thanks to Martin for his patience whilst we poured over various bits of vegetation and for his expertise in spotting and recognising the dragonflies. Warm summer Sundays can be wonderful, but this one proved just a little too good as mid-day approached so that our numbers depleted over lunch!

Pat Woodruffe

Strange Horsetails in the Water Park: Complex Polystachion Configurations in North Wiltshire



The Wiltshire Botanical Society explored the new reserves at Lower Moor and Clattinger Farms and the Ashton Keynes Cotswold Water Park this July and August. Marsh Horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*) has become widespread in this area. Typically, fertile plants of Marsh Horsetail have one spore-producing cone at the tip of the bottlebrush stem. However, in this area, many of the plants seem to have become confused and have produced cones on the tips of side-branches lower down the stem. This arrangement is called a *polystachion*. The photo by Pat Woodruffe and drawings by myself show the arrangement.

There were three main types, with nine variants in all. These were: scattered branch-tip cones; radially-symmetrically organised upper whorl cones (the commonest); and radially-symmetrically organised lower whorl cones (the rarest). Two specimen were found with five whorls of coned branch tips; this last would certainly seem to be a record, as the very few accounts of *E. palustre* polystachions to be found only describe scattered, one or two upper branch-tip cone polystachions.

One German account is of English material. The two English accounts suggest damage to the central axis as the exclusive cause of polystachions in *E. palustre*. Donald Grose recorded *E. palustre* polystachions at eighteen sites in Wiltshire, and did not agree with the commonly held theory of a purely environmental cause. The author referred to colonies showing the same patterns in successive years. I have three reasons for agreeing with Grose and suspect that there are populations in north Wiltshire and southwest Berkshire which are genetically susceptible to producing extra cones. In addition there may be two (or more) environmental triggers.

Jack Oliver

Photo Pat Woodruffe



Belties at work



Sunday 12 July 2006, afternoon

CLATTINGER FARM

Leader: Martin Buckland

It was a hot, hot day. In such heat you feel the need to indulge in Continental habits and have a siesta after lunch, but no, we were off and away into the fields of Clattinger. Some members had left at lunchtime, including Richard who left us each with a piece of yummy chocolate birthday cake.

We entered into pasture fields inhabited by Belted Galloways (Belties). They have 30 on the farm and another 70 cattle of "mixed race". They run in the large pasture fields, namely "Mrs Ody's Pasture" and "Washpool". They do make a profit from raising cattle for beef, although the Belties take longer to mature for flavoursome meat.

The fields we entered were well grazed but not hard grazed. There was a scattering of flowers but the cattle had enjoyed most of them by this time of year. We found Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*) Pepper Saxifrage (*Silaum silaus*) and our most exciting find was Distant Sedge (*Carex distans*).

We moved into Ditch Field which was uncut hay, (it is permitted to be cut after July 1st). It was a beautiful picture of flowering herbs. Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) was in profusion but the grass was not thick enough to please a farmer dependent on hay crops for a livelihood.

Martin explained that all fields are at slightly different levels with different depths of soil over lying the gravels, as a consequence, each hay field supports most of the same plants but have their own specialities.

We found Greater Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*) Betony (*Stachys officinalis*) Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) Pepper Saxifrage (*Silaum silaus*) Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*) Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) meadow Barley (*Hordeum secalinum*) and many spent Orchids.

Front Field is Martin's favourite field and all the species were there in profusion and a most impressive spread

of Pepper Saxifrage. He told us that the two fields are noted for their Green-winged Orchids (*Orchis morio*) but each year brings it's own numbers. In 2000, Front field had a count of 10,000, but this year, 2006, they counted 25,000 – Wow.

It really was very hot so I'm afraid we didn't stay too long. We had a glorious impression of those two hayfields and we made a resolution to visit earlier next year to see them in their springtime glory.

Eileen Rollo

A Six Metre *Phragmites* Aerial Stem

The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Cotswold Water Park Society encourage Reed swamps in the gravel pits around Ashton Keynes. Three of us were struggling through dense stands of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) when we came across and were partly entangled by two plants, one four and a half and one six metres long. These were half way between vertical stems and stolons, non-flowering but semi-horizontal at waist to shoulder height. The nodes were about 20-30 cm apart, some with short aerial roots, or shoots, or both. The internodes were less rigid than the surrounding vertical culms, and these stems snaked at mid-heights along through the verticals. Are aerial stolons known for these species?

Jack Oliver

Thursday 3 August 2006

LANDFORD BOG

Leaders: Chris Riley, Jeremy Wood and Pat Woodruffe

This Wiltshire Trust New Forest reserve is an internationally rare habitat of wet heath and lowland bog. On this particularly day however, after our gorgeous hot summer the ground was very dry with deep cracks.

This sandy acid grassland, typified by a landscape of tumps of purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and crowns of rushes and sedges, is managed by Chris Riley and a quartet of New Forest ponies. Ling, Cross-leaved Heath and Bell Heather grow together here and the ubiquitous bramble gives nectar to the butterflies and cover to the rabbits and adders although probably not snuggled up together! A strip of birch woodland borders the bog and there is a scattering of sparkling willows. Raft spiders live here too, eight legs gingerly balancing on water.

Pale Butterwort is the rarity, looking more modest margarine than full fat butter at this time of year! Skullcap and Lousewort, does too tight a cap cause lice? Interesting juxtaposition of plants!

Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* nestled in the bog, seductive delicate red filaments luring in live dinner. Rich brown spent Bog Asphodel spikes standing on grassy mounds, reminders of their golden past and many and varied rushes and sedges, bulbous, beaked, slender, spiked and sharp!

It was a lovely morning and many thanks to Chris, Pat and Jeremy.

The incomplete plant list is:

Carex spicata and *viridula* (Spiked and Yellow Sedge), *Juncus acutiflorus*, *bulbosus*, *conglomeratus*, *squarrosus* and *tenuis*, (Sharp-flowered, Bulbous, Compact, Heath, and Slender Rush), *Luzula multiflorus* (Heath Wood-rush), *Danthonia decumbens* (Heath-grass), *Molinia caerulea* (Purple Moor-grass), *Narthecium ossifragum* (Bog Asphodel), *Rhynchospora alba* (White Beak-sedge), *Trichophorum cespitosum* (Deergrass), *Athyrium filix-femina* (Lady Fern), *Drosera rotundifolia* (Round-leaved Sundew), *Epilobium palustre* (Marsh Willowherb), *Galium palustre* (Marsh Bedstraw), *Hypericum elodes* (Marsh St. John's-wort), *Pinguicula lusitanica* (Pale Butterwort), *Potamogeton* sp. (*polygonifolius*?) (Bog Pondweed?), *Ranunculus lingua* (Greater Spearwort), *Scutellaria minor* (Lesser Skullcap) and *Veronica scutellata* (Marsh Speedwell).

We talked about the meaning of the word 'wort' and Chris who speaks Icelandic suggested it is derived from the Norse word *jurta* meaning plant so wort

probably means plant; you all probably know that!

After lunch we went to the nearby

LANDFORD LODGE TREE NURSERY

We were very kindly carted on straw bales pulled behind the Land Rover driven by Jemma, past rows of beautifully arranged, healthy and hopeful young saplings of every possible species. We went deep into the wood to admire a very beautiful South American evergreen with stunning white flowers called *Eucryphia nynansensis* and other exotics including *Eucalyptus gunnii* with very tactile papery peeling pinky bark, very much at home on such a lovely hot day. Victorian favourites such as Rhododendrons with their usual buddies Japanese Acers and the elegant but not flowering Handkerchief tree.

We spent some time exploring the soil between the tree plantations and found a good collection of arable weeds including Common Fumitory, Small Nettle, Corn Marigold, Shaggy Soldier and Sharp Leaved Fluellen. Pat spotted the delicately orange and not so common Long Headed Poppy, whose flowers only last for one day and there were some plants for coverts for game birds including fine plumes of millet in full glossy seed. One green crop beauty was *Phacelia tanacetifolia* all blue upright clustered bells.

Our thanks to Simon Hunt, the nursery manager, and Jemma Hill, one of the nursery assistants, for their hospitality; what a fabulous tree nursery!

Lesley Wallington

Wednesday 16 August 2006

Cotswold Water Park

**Leader: Gareth Harris CWP
Biodiversity Officer**

The planned destination of Wheatley Barn Farm (also known as CWP Pit 95) had to be changed at short notice however the alternative was no lesser a place to visit. How many of us have had a chance to walk through the middle of a reed bed? There are over 140 lakes all dug by gravel extraction in the area; each with its own unique number but today's visit took place at the Cleveland Farm Complex pit numbers 68c and 68d.

14 members listened as Gareth explained that the pits we were to look through had first been dug for gravel and then gradually backfilled with silt, a by-product that arises from gravel washing at the nearby works. The resulting silt filled lagoon of 68d with a small lake at one end (dry today) attracts a lot of willow, mainly white and osier to grow but Norfolk Reed, *Phragmites australis* has also taken a big stand and is now the main emphasis of conservation i.e. to promote the reed bed at the expense of willow. Volunteers from many Conservation groups partake in work parties to cut and kill the willows and we were able to see the resulting young reeds pushing through.

I think many of us were wary of our situation as it was explained that the silt is similar to quick sand however as long as we kept to the cut rides we were okay. The cut rides are actually bird ringers' net lanes so well tramped already.

Much of the 'ground' flora was made up of Water Mint, *Mentha aquatica*; Gipsywort, *Lycopus europaeus* and Marsh Horsetail, *Equisetum palustre*. The latter plant catching the eye of Jack Oliver who soon discovered some Polystachion or multi-branched plants with multi-coned stems.

What did seem unusual was the heights of some of the plants as this season they have not only had to struggle with a long dry season but presumably also a permanently low mineral base (the plants are just growing in silt) yet whilst say the Grey Club-Rush, *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* found at the edge of the rides seemed a good size, the Purple Loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria* and Hoary Willowherb, *Epilobium parviflorum* barely reached above 30cm.

We made 'camp' on a slightly raised and drier ex-haul route for lorries from where we spread out in a few groups to seek out goodies. Immediately Brookweed, *Samolus valerandi* was found on the track (I can't believe it's a member of the Primrose family) and then someone with an acute eye spotted a single tiny Forget-me-not flower which was identified as *Myosotis laxa*, or Tufted Forget-me-not. While several of us poured over this it was realised that Knotted Pearlwort, *Sagina*

nodosa was growing by the side of it.

Much of the haul route was undoubtedly made up of imported soil as Common Fleabane, *Pulicaria dysenterica*; Red Bartsia, *Odontites verna* and Wild Angelica, *Angelica sylvestris* was seen along with a few plants of Montbretia, *Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora* and I even found a Shasta Daisy, *Leucanthemum x superbum*. Tall but very yellowy Pendulous Sedge, *Carex pendula* were found at the junction of the track and tucked at the edge was found a few *Sison amomum* or Stone Parsley plants. The books all claim this plant has an odour like petrol when bruised but most disagreed; smell but not Shell!

At the end of one of the rides a triangular stemmed 'plant' had Joy Newton, Pat Woodruffe, 'Stace' et al beat over its identification. Some local searching found several plants around sufficient for a sample to be taken....results hopefully at the end of this chapter.

As we got back to our camp, another group had discovered an almost barren sandy patch and to everyone's enjoyment saw a couple of very nice Lesser Centaury, *Centaureum pulchellum* plants with gorgeous cerise pink starry flowers and for good comparison a single Common Centaury, *Centaureum erythraea*.

Hop Sedge, *Carex pseudocyperus*; Common Spike-rush, *Eleocharis palustris*; Bristly Ox-tongue, *Picris echioides* and Hemp agrimony, *Eupatorium cannabinum* was added to the list and fisherman Jack claimed he 'caught' a 19ft long *Phragmites* stem.

At 68c, the dry weather enabled us to keep our feet dry until we got near the water's edge. Hard and Soft Rush abound and Jointed Rush, *Juncus articulatus* found near the water along with further finds of stunning Grey Club-rush. Celery-leaved Buttercup, *Ranunculus sceleratus* and Blue Water-Speedwell, *Veronica anagallis-aquatica* but the plant I found fascinating was a diminutive clump of Needle Spike-rush, *Eleocharis acicularis* just showing its 'head' above water.

Lastly, a quick visit to the edge of some 'real' water of lake 68b. Gareth used a double headed drag to pull in some waterweed and we were able to identify Spiked Water-Milfoil, *Myriophyllum spicatum*; Nuttall's Waterweed, *Elodea nuttallii* and Hair-like Pondweed, *Potamogeton trichoides*. Finally on the bank another garden escape was found but in the lovely form of Purple Toadflax, *Linaria purpurea*.

Our thanks to Gareth for a superb day.

Martin Buckland

Wednesday 13 September 2006

Savernake Forest Ponds

Leaders: Jack Oliver and Joan Davies

There once were twelve old or ancient ponds in Savernake Forest, and a newer one with a plastic liner from only forty or so years ago. Joan Davies mapped these, and has historical data on most. Sadly, most are dry in summer and some even dry also in winter. Decades or centuries of dead leaves from encroaching trees have created soggy, dark mud traps with bubbles of hydrogen sulphide escaping around one's Wellington boots.

Seven attendees first visited two dry ponds near The Column in the south part of the forest. We then spent longer at Bitham Pond by Postwives' Walk near Charcoal Burners' Road. Bitham Pond dates from Saxon times. Only one eighth of this pond remains open water. There were amphibians, Southern Hawker dragonflies and fifteen or so angiosperm species reliant on the remaining water. Floating vegetation will soon completely cover any water, and *Sparganium* and *Typha* encroach inwards over deep mud.

Thornhill Pond dates from the 1600s, but its impending fate is shared with Bitham Pond. Perhaps each has four years remaining. Again, one eighth remains as open water, with the encroachments again from trees, but this time with Reed Sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*) as the dominant emergent species over the soft deep mud now occupying half the original pond area.



Yes, there is open water: photo Richard Gosnell



The spiky Water Soldier: Pphoto Joan Davies

The flowering plant species count was as follows:

Land plants (non-woody)	14 (3 unusual)
Marshy species	5
Emergent species	11 (1 rare for Wilts)
Floating species	11 (2 unusual, 1 rare for Wilts)
Submerged species	3 (1 unusual, 1 rare for Wilts)

Some of these species included Violet Helleborine, Musk, Scaly Male Fern, Water Purslane, Fringed Water-lily, Greater Duckweed, Hornwort, and the extraordinary Water-soldier. The last (*Stratiotes aloides*, from the strange family of flowering plants with expanding marine populations, the *Hydrocharitaceae*) was seen as both floating and spiny rosettes and as softer submerged plants.

Forest ponds are beautiful areas with a different range of species disproportionate to their relatively small areas. Flowering plants, amphibians and invertebrates are not the only organisms dependent on such habitats. Even if most of the twelve ancient ponds cannot be conserved or reclaimed for financial reasons, perhaps three (like the Sibylline Books) should be rescued. We have three more years to save them.

Jack Oliver



Photo Joan Davies

A very hairy caterpillar

If you want to track down these ponds, here are the details. The 8-figure National Grid references give the location to the nearest 10 metres. A GPS is handy to find the exact position.

All of these ponds are marked on the 1880 County Series, OS map of 6ins to 1 mile.

Name of Pond	Grid Reference	Description
Birch	SU23626548	Full of birch trees
Bitham	SU22186518	Marked on all modern OS maps & on the 1786 Estate map
Column North (2)	SU22866480	Large with many trees around
Column South (1)	SU22876473	Fencing around pond
Crockmere	SU23846604	Marked on the 1786 Estate map
Kite	SU22986517	Kidney shape.
Leigh Hill Large	SU22136448	Medium size
Leigh Hill Small	SU21916451	Small
Oak Plantation	SU20156822	Dry and contains fallen trees. Marked on OS (6in) revised 1930-45 and next to a footpath which no longer exists
Pottery (3)	SU21986500	On flat ground. In an oak plantation. Contains water, has very low bank.
Thornhill (4)	SU21766661	Marked on all modern OS maps & on the 1786 Estate map
Yew Tree	SU23486513	Large pond by side of minor track, with a large yew at edge of pond





The Pepperbox: photo Pat Woodruffe

Pepperbox Hill Project

Pepperbox Hill is owned by The National Trust and is part of the Brickworth Down & Dean Hill SSSI. The site lies immediately adjacent and east of A36, between Salisbury and Whiteparish and is well known for its stand of Juniper.

The site has become increasingly dominated by scrub over the 35 years in which I have known it. The grasslands support, or have supported, a wide range of species and therefore NT recognises that the right balance must be struck between the two habitats and that management after any scrub clearance is essential if the aims and objectives are to be met.

Chris Gingell, of NT, has asked the Wilts Botanical Society members to prepare a detailed classification of the scrub, its stages of development and characteristic species – as well as noting any rare or unusual

species. For example, *Rosa micrantha* has been recorded in the past and any indication of active Juniper regeneration would be most welcome. The purpose is to establish the types of scrub present and this knowledge should assist in future management decisions. The Society will be paid for this undertaking and this could include some members' expenses, as well as the production of maps, photographs and other materials for the final report.

Anne Appleyard, Jeremy Wood and I are happy to form a local nucleus but we would welcome help from all interested members. Much of the work will take place this autumn and winter, and will have commenced by the time this note is in print, although it is highly likely that some identification issues will not be resolved until next season.

If you are interested in a little 'out of season' botanical work, then please get in touch.

Pat Woodruffe

Are You on Email?

Email can be useful for getting messages to you. Could you please send us your email address if you have not already done so? We will not broadcast your address to other members and will use 'Blind Carbon Copy' to avoid this if we send out group mailings.

There is no need to use the post; you can just send an email, saying that you would like the WBS to have your address, to richardaisbitt@yahoo.co.uk. I can then copy your address from the email.



Photo Charlie Bell

Recording at Stonehenge

Stonehenge is a place so important it has World Heritage Site status, putting it on equal footing with the Pyramids and the Great Wall of China. But few of the 800,000 annual visitors realise that in the landscape surrounding the stones a more modern project of equal scope and vision is being undertaken. Much of the land surrounding Stonehenge is owned by the National Trust, and of this a significant proportion has been reverted from arable to chalk downland. So far five fields totalling 260 hectares have been reverted - the remainder of the target area will be reverted between 2007 and 2011.

The National Trust offers 6 month voluntary placements at Stonehenge, which are perfect for recent graduates like myself to gain valuable experience. As Conservation Officer I have spent the summer designing and implementing a monitoring programme for these reversion fields. Very little monitoring has been done in the past, so hopefully my methodology can be repeated on an annual basis to form an archive of data.

In each reversion field I recorded up to 40 quadrats, listing all species present and their DAFOR scores. The results were extremely interesting - the species composition changed markedly with the age of the reversion, with mainly arable weeds in the newly reverted fields giving way to good grassland species such as Quaking Grass, Yellow Rattle, Sainfoin and Salad Burnet in the older fields. Some fields had in excess of 50 species.

Next summer there will be a new Conservation Officer who will continue the monitoring of this exciting reversion project. However, like me, their experience of chalk grassland flora may be limited and they may welcome help from more experienced botanists. If you are interested in volunteering to help out with this monitoring project next summer please get in touch. Contact the Conservation Officer at the National Trust's Stonehenge Office on **01980 664780**. Travel expenses can be claimed.

If you would like to learn more about Stonehenge Landscape, there is a programme of guided walks around the area lead by local volunteers. To find out more please ring the number above.

Charlie Bell

*Conservation Officer, Stonehenge
Landscape*



Marbled White: photo Charlie Bell

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE

Richard Aisbitt	Chairman, newsletter, records	01793 694680	richardaisbitt@yahoo.co.uk
Anne Appleyard	Annual Field Trip	01980 610 385	
Paul Darby	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	01380 725670	pdarby@wiltshirewildlife.org
Rosemary Duckett	Secretary	01373 858296	rosemary.duckett@virgin.net
Sonia Heywood	Website, Botanical Surveys	01380 830478	sonia.heywood@tesco.net
Ron Hurst		01225 865672	
Jack Oliver		01672 861251	
Sharon Pilkington	BSBI Recorder for Wiltshire	01225 835227	sharon.pilkington@npaconsult.co.uk
John Presland	Editor/Wiltshire Botany	01225 865125	johnpresland@tiscali.co.uk
Sarah Priest	Minutes Secretary	01635 268 442	spriest@newburyweb.net
Eileen Rollo		01264 359434	earollo@hotmail.co.uk
Lesley Wallington	Treasurer	01225 703706	
Pat Woodruffe	Meetings Secretary	01794 884436	pmw.bentley@waitrose.com
Simon Young		01225 769551	drsimonyoung@yahoo.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:

Lesley Wallington
42 Ingram Road, Melksham, Wiltshire SN12 7J

Telephone: 01225 703706
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From the Editor

Thank you to all the willing (or at least, compliant) volunteers who wrote accounts of our visits. The quality of your contributions means that I have to do very little editing.

Other short articles with botanical interest are always welcome; there are several here to serve as examples. There are other themes we could follow, for instance identification tips, observations about the distribution or ecology of plants or plant groups, or just "I was surprised to find this here. Has anyone else seen it?".

Photos are also very welcome. Cost will probably prevent us from using colour for the time being. Bold, contrasty designs work best in black and white. Also, are there any cartoonists out there?

I aim to send out the next newsletter in early April 2007, so **all copy to me by 24 March 2007 please.**

Please send material to:

84 Goddard Avenue
Swindon
Wilts SN1 4HT (Email: see above)

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