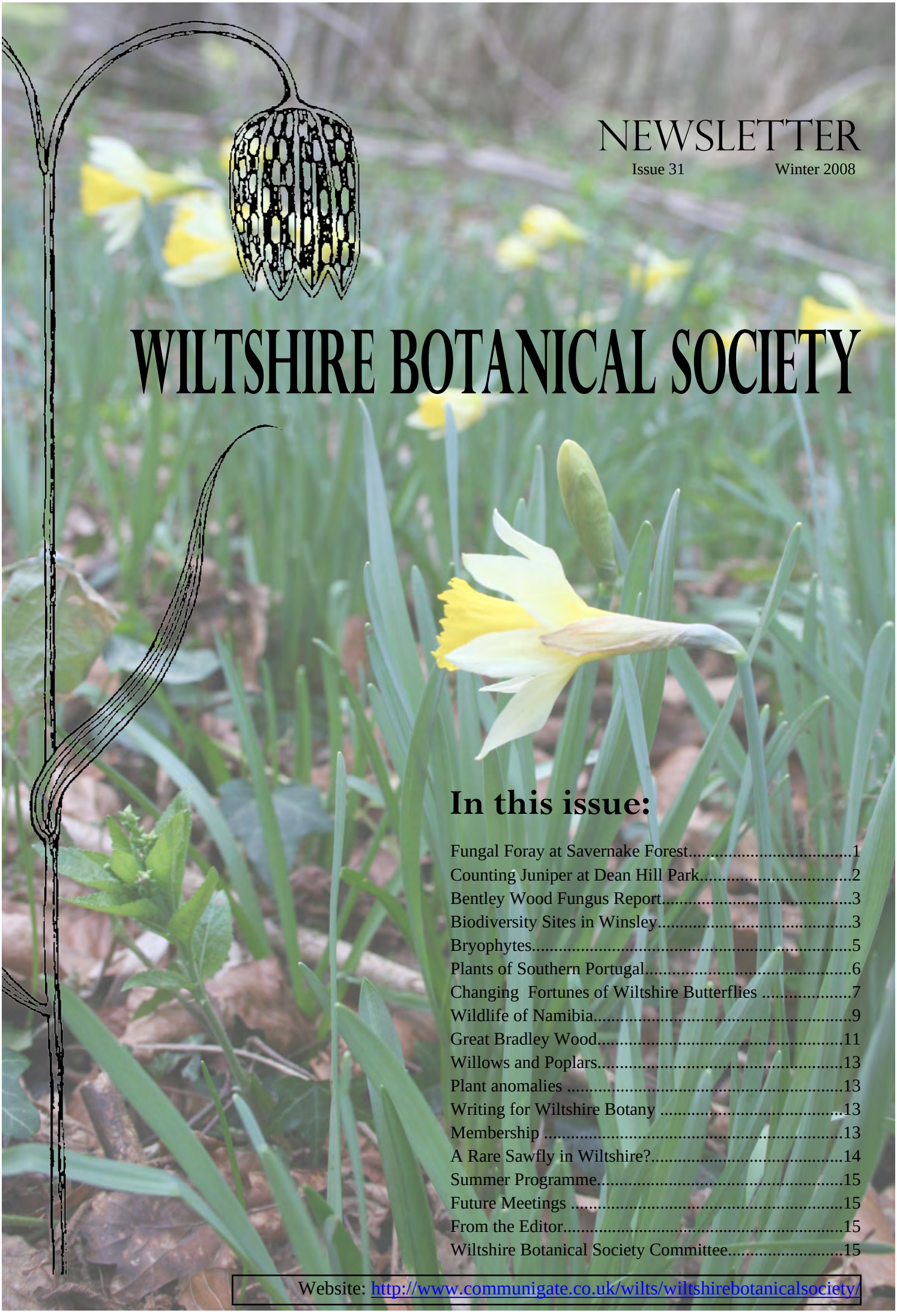


NEWSLETTER

Issue 31 Winter 2008

WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

In this issue:

Website: http://www.communigate.co.uk/wilts/wiltshirebotanicalsociety/

Sunday 7 October 2007

Fungal Foray at Savernake Forest

Leaders: Peter Marren and Malcolm Storey

Fourteen people gathered at the Column in Savernake Forest for the annual fungal foray. Our leaders Peter and Malcolm advised that 'there isn't much about' and as if to bear this out Joy Newton, who had a searched the previous day and earlier that morning, produced a trug 'unladen' with two specimens, a Smokey Bracket *Bjenkandera adusta* and a False Death-Cap *Amanita citrina.*

Unperturbed by the apparent lack of fungi, we searched the local area, which was predominantly Beech wood. Amongst some grass and other low vegetation we found many Pleated Inkcaps *Coprinus plicatus* along with *Psathyrella gracilis* sitting amongst accumulated leaf litter.

We spotted the Deer-shield Toadstool *Pluteus cervinus o*n layers of woody, sawdusty material; ours was a rather dry and young specimen. Peter pointed out that good ones smell of Radishes and have pink spores!

Fungi of course come in all different sizes, Beech Polypore……..large semi-saucers were seen on trunks.

Candlesnuff Fungus - Richard Aisbitt

Then amongst all the litter, moss and ground flora a diminutive Fairy-bell or Saffron-drop Bonnet *Mycena crocata*, whose sap turns red when damaged, was found alongside some Candlesnuff *Xylosphaera hypoxylon.* However, the delightful Orange Moss-cap *Rickenella fibula* was absolutely miniscule; a tiny little apricot coloured 'dot' growing in moss. Very well spotted I say.

I appreciate some fungi are edible and some not; a Pontefracty cake looking fungus looked tempting. It formed black jelly-like cups, again found on a fallen Beech log and was called Black Bulgar *Bulgaria inquinans.*

Peter explained that the group of fungi called Mycenas contained 'hundreds' of species and that not many were to be found in the guide books and I am not surprised as the next specimen *Mycena flavescens* was no bigger than a pinhead; like a micro is to the macro in the Moth world so to speak.

As a novice, I like common names, so Hares-foot Ink-cap *Coprinus lagopus* sounded pretty good. However Artist's Bracket was not so good for a sad looking Beech tree or for myself in my day job working in Parks and Open Spaces for a local authority. A nice common name but its scientific name, *Ganoderma applanatum* is one we dread to hear when found amongst ornamental trees in the public domain. This fungus 'eats' the lignin or supporting material of a tree and so weakens the structure. The fact that it has Cocoa-powder like spores did not take away what a serious beast this is.

I am not sure what gives a toadstool the name "Deceiver" but both this *Laccaria laccata* and Amethyst Deceiver *L. amethysta* were seen.

At the grass area by the Column itself several different specimens were seen. First a gorgeous orangey Spectacular Rust-Gill *Gymnpilus junonius* under the canopy of a Beech tree and then another *Psathyrella,* this time, *P. hydrophila* grew in a wet crevice on a Beech, Further up on a dead limb in the same tree was a very nice Porcelain Fungus *Oudemansiella micida.* Others of interest were Fairy Clubs *Clavulina cinereum;* at the edge of a grass path Golden Spindles, and the lovely sounding Green-cracked Bristle-Gill *Russula virescens*. As we walked towards a recently extended pond, another Fairy-Bell, or Black-edged Bonnet *Mycena helianthema* was found on the way, as was the Charcoal Burner *Russula cyanoxantha.*

At the disturbed ground around the pond *Psathyrella melanleuca* was seen as were many *Turbaria furfuracea,* Scurfy Twiglet that likes to feed on sticks and wood chips. What does a fungus expert put in his lunch box? Clearly not bread as I witnessed Malcolm scooping up some Rabbit poo to take home. (To examine a fungus he found growing on it of course!).

Peter was pleased to find a scarce fungus called *Pluteus luctuosus*.

The common Sulphur Tuft *Hypholoma fasciculare* grew in amongst a rotten Beech stump and next to it on an Elder stem was Jew's-ear *Auricularia auricula-judae* but to me the most delightful of the day, also on an Elder twig was the white *Clitopilus hobsonii.*

To finish off, as we walked back to our cars, Toughshanks *Collybia dryophila* feeding on moss, an Earthball, *Scleroderma citrinum* and Shaggy Scaly-cap *Pholiota squarrosa.*

Many thanks to Peter and Malcolm who made today very enjoyable……..what do you mean 'there ain't much about?!'.

Martin Buckland

Saturday 13 October 2007

Counting Juniper at Dean Hill Park

Juniper seedling- Pat Woodruffe

A group of around 15 from WBS, Plantlife and the Dean Hill Conservation Group meet on 13th October to survey some of the juniper populations on this site.

We spent the morning looking at disused railway sidings where some relatively young juniper had been found growing along the steep banks and, in the afternoon, moved to a site where the bushes were all old and some dead or dying. With some regret, I have to admit that both sites were just over the county boundary and thus in Hampshire. There are however quite a few old bushes on the Wiltshire part of the site and even a couple of younger ones.

Our aim in the morning was to document each bush recording its National Grid Reference, height, condition and whether or not it was fruiting. The prize was to find the smallest and thus youngest, so establishing that regeneration was currently taking place. What success we had! After a couple of hours' work we had a tally of 65 specimens varying from 3.5m to 0.03m. 44 of these were less than 1m tall and around 20 were first or second year seedlings of 3 – 7cm. They are not difficult to spot – once you get your eye in!

A well-grown Juniper - Pat Woodruffe

Even more encouraging is that our mission has not ended at this point. Sue Fitzpatrick obtained permission for a group of her students to do some clearing work around the bushes which we had marked. This took place in December and a further 20 bushes 'came to light' during the day. One was a staggering 5m tall – how did we miss that – but the majority was quite tiny. A group of us then returned in January to document these plants and, low and behold, found even more. The current count is 100+ and we seem to find a few more each time we visit.

The afternoon provided a complete contrast. Although we counted around 166 bushes, only 4 were regarded as young, 14 as mature, 110 as old and 38 as dead. There is no sign of regeneration within this population but the vegetation surrounding the bushes is dense and there is no bare chalk. Plenty of scope for future management!

Our thanks to everyone who took part in this day and also to the owner of Dean Hill Park for allowing access and for completing additional management work.

Anne Appleyard, Sue Fitzpatrick and Pat Woodruffe

Amanita battarae - Ted Gange

Sunday 4 November 2007

Bentley Wood Fungus Report

Leader: Ted Gange

2007 was not in general terms a particularly good year for finding fungi: early on it was dry and quite cool so most of the rust fungi did not appear at all and neither did many of those tiny (and usually black) little Ascomycetes which live on the dead stems of the previous year's herbaceous remains. Then there was a very wet spell in the summer which prevented the powdery mildews from fruiting but which gave us hope of a decent autumn's collecting. Alas, the weather returned to harsh dryness before August had scarce begun and this effectively cut out the early species but during our annual foray in the Redridge Copse area of Bentley Wood, on 4th November, we found 109 species.

My records show that I have examined between 2000 and 2500 individual fungi from Bentley Wood during 2007, amounting to 263 species. 32 species had not been seen in Bentley before and 5 of these had not been found in South Wiltshire previously. Of those five, I think that ***Amanita battarae*** must rank as number one: the latest checklist from Kew in 2005 states that it is known only from three English localities. Another interesting find was that of ***Lepidoderma crassipes*** which is an unusual Myxomycete and, again, a new South Wiltshire record. Other first Wiltshire records found on our foray were ***Russula sylvestris*** and a fungus which parasitises Fairy Clubs of the genus *Clavulina,* ***Helminthosphaeria clavariarum.*** The remaining first record is that of ***Taphrina betulae*** (not *betulina,* which causes Witch's Brooms). This species attacks and disfigures Birch leaves.

Another interesting find this year, although not new to Wiltshire, was ***Claviceps purpurea*** or **Ergot** whose poisonous black sclerotia replace the seeds of their grass host. I have not seen it myself since 1984.

The total number of species recorded so far from Bentley Wood stands at 923, which I think is quite creditable and, given a good collecting season in 2008, we should get pretty close to the magic thousand mark. It may be of interest that I currently hold over 8300 individual records from Bentley Wood.

Ted Gange

Saturday 10 November 2007

Biodiversity Sites in Winsley

Speaker: John Presland

The National Environment and Rural Communities act of 2006 requires public authorities to identify and conserve biodiversity. John talked to us about the sites in Winsley where he lives. The area covers two villages and four hamlets and comprises farmland on the plateau, wooded slopes and riverside, as well as lanes with biodiversity interest. In places stone walls have been replaced by scrub, hedges and fencing.

The first site described is a protected bank alongside WINSLEY HILL which supports Mignonette, Common Spotted and Pyramidal Orchids, Felwort, Fairy Flax, Yellow-wort, Eyebright (feeding on the thicker grasses), Dwarf thistle, Burnet Saxifrage, Deadly Nightshade, Small Scabious and, in spite of the dryness, Greater Horsetail.

WESSEX WATER RESERVOIR has been managed since 1990 for nature conservation. It has a thin layer of limestone soil on top in which grow Greater Hawkbit, Glaucous Sedge, Hop Trefoil, Mouse-Ear Hawkweed, Pyramidal Orchids, Quaking Grass, Small Toadflax and Green-Winged Orchid, a near-threatened species nationally, needing short turf. When the reservoir was repaired the turf was replaced and recovered over the course of two years.

The Parish Council purchased MURHILL BANK in 1997. It is a steep meadow with a small copse at each end. The bank was cleared and fencing, steps, seats and a stile installed, a signpost erected and a printed leaflet published. In winter it is grazed by North Ronaldsay sheep. Plant species present in the open area are: Hairy Violet, Rockrose, Horseshoe Vetch, Common Milkwort, Yellow Rattle, Sainfoin, Oxeye Daisy Valerian, Hedge Bedstraw, Common Gromwell, Marjoram, Large Thyme, Ploughman's Spikenard, over-vigorous Hemp Agrimony, Rest Harrow, Wild Basil, and Mistletoe on the old apple trees. Marbled White, Brown Argus and Common Blue

Butterflies, and Five-Spot Burnet Moths are present in summer. Nettle-Leaved Bellflower and Black Bryony grow along the hedges. The west wood contains mainly Wych Elm and although much has been cleared the trees are still closer than the Forestry Commission recommend. Stinking Iris, Wood Sanicle and Bath Asparagus flourish but there has been little success with introducing bluebells and primroses. The east wood consists mainly of Ash with Spurge Laurel undercover. Fungi include Yellow Brain fungus, *Bisporella citrina*, Winter Fungus (on dead elm), Wrinkled Peach on Elm (one of six sites in North Wilts) and *Psathyrella atrolaminata*, which is quite common in Winsley.

STILL MEADOW and another meadow nearby are privately owned. Between them, they feature White Helleborine (a nationally vulnerable plant), Bee Orchid (including var. *belgarum*), Common Broomrape, Yellow-wort (after grazing by calves), Field Scabious and Lesser Knapweed.

The ponds at LITTLE ASHLEY have been cleared out of recent years and are cared for by local people as a second parish nature reserve. One has a 19th century cobbled base and was used for cleaning the wheels of carts and the smaller one has a flight of steps. Plants growing here are Water Mint, Narrow-Fruited Watercress (rare in VC8, scarce in VC7), Fool's Watercress, Water Plantain, and Pink Water Speedwell with Almond-Leaved Willow on the banks. The ponds are home to Great Crested and Common Newts, Water Shrimp and Water Louse and Mallard.

BRADFORD RUGBY CLUB ground was created some years ago and a boundary strip retained for biodiversity. It contains Common Star of Bethlehem. The pond originally on the site was bulldozed but there is a possibility it may be restored.

Local ROADSIDES and FOOTPATHS have hosted the nationally vulnerable Henbane, Round-Leaved Cranesbill, common along local roads but not elsewhere, Fiddle Dock and Keel-fruited Cornsalad. An elm stump beside a footpath had Winter Fungus, Velvet Shank, Fairies' Bonnets and a bracket fungus growing on it in 2003 and Ink cap, Dryad's Saddle and Dead man's Fingers in 2007.

STONE WALLS form a linear nature reserve and the mosses and lichens present create soil for the establishment of such plants as Biting Stonecrop, Rue-leaved Saxifrage, Shining Cranesbill, Common Whitlowgrass and Wall Pennywort. Care is needed when rebuilding walls to ensure that the flora remains. John has written a booklet on dry stone walls, available at Society meetings.

The RIVER AND CANAL provide a habitat for River Water Crowfoot and Small Teasel. Greater Dodder has been found growing on riverside nettles.

WOODLAND areas contain Common Helleborine, Bird's Nest Orchid (nationally threatened and scarce in both VC7 and 8) and Greater Butterfly Orchid (nationally threatened but not scarce in Wilts).

PRIVATE GARDENS also provide a rich habitat. For his own garden he listed Scarlet Pimpernel, Common Field, Grey and Ivy-leaved Speedwells, Round-leaved and Sharp-leaved Fluellen, a subspecies of Long-headed Poppy (*Papaver dubium* subsp. *lecoqii*), Dwarf Spurge, Common Mullein, Lesser Celandine, Yellow Flag and Marshwort. Visitors from the animal kingdom were Ramshorn Snail, Heron, Grass Snake, Toads, Frogs, Smooth Newt, Palmate Newt, Southern Hawker, Broad-bodied Chaser, Common Darter or Ruddy Darter, Slugs, Cockchafer, Herald Moth, Lappet, Painted Lady, Garden, Diadem and Cross spider and Pheasant.

Though not a botanical feature, it should be mentioned that an old stone mine in Winsley is a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of its Greater Horseshoe Bats.

BIODIVERSITY MAPS. What needs to be done by Winsley Parish Council? In July 2005 it accepted a proposal from a councillor/ecologist to draw up a biodiversity policy and make plans to implement it. Ideally all those who could contribute to the implementation of such a policy should be involved, including local land downers, bodies responsible for the River Avon and Kennet and Avon Canal, national and local conservation bodies and home-owners interested in promoting wildlife in their own gardens. The plans should involve a map of areas of current and potential biodiversity interest. John has begun to prepare such a map for his own interest.

A parish council can do all sorts of things within such a plan. It can manage its own nature reserves, playing fields, footpaths and road verges so that there is no overall loss of biodiversity and that it is enhanced whenever possible. Hedges and dry stone walls can be put round sites, mowing policies can encourage wild life, unused areas of grassland could be ploughed and replanted with wild flower seeds.

As far as practicable, a site with a particular plant or animal community should be near enough to similar sites to allow a lost species to be replaced from another site and to promote interbreeding with plants or animals of the same species elsewhere to promote diversity within the species. The latter makes for healthier plants and animals and a better chance of some individuals being able to survive minor changes in the habitat. Wherever possible, there should be "wildlife corridors" running right through the parish – like the woodlands that run from Conkwell to the west end of Winsley Hill and then, after a short gap, along both sides of the main lane through Murhill and down to the canal. A wild flower meadow corridor is feasible, beginning with the verges on Winsley Hill, through Murhill Bank and Avon Park property, behind Dorothy House and across meadows near the cricket field and south of Bradford Road to Wessex Water property at the east end of the village.

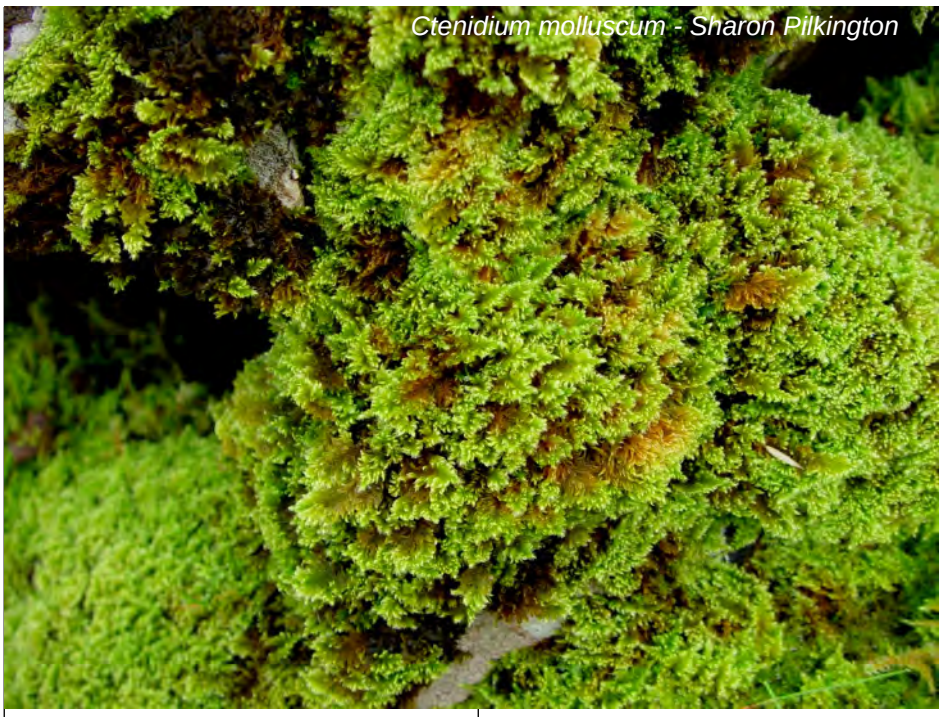
Another feature of the plan would involve education, advice and awareness – to the Winsley Cricket Club, the Bradford-on-Avon Rugby Club and the Bradford and Winsley Community and Sports Association, home-owners, farmers, other public bodies, using advisory literature such as John's dry stone walls guide.

Gillian King

Saturday 16th February 2008

Bryophytes

Sharon Pilkington


Ctenidium molluscum - Sharon Pilkington

Ken Adams was ill so his talk on the flora of Essex has had to be postponed.

Sharon and Pat, with little time available, prepared two half-hour talks for us. These were not only splendid, but came from opposite ends of the botanical spectrum. Bryophytes are a branch that some of us still find daunting to the point of mental near-blankness whereas many of us have had happy times with the sunlit flora of Southern Europe.

Sharon reminded us that this is an appropriate time to consider bryophytes as they are little winter wonders, with their best season from now until mid April. And indeed, many of the photographs she showed us were unexpectedly floriferous – or anyway capsulous – and beautiful.

Sharon grouped her bryophytes by habitat. It does sound as if many of them are tightly habitat-specific. This will help us when we get to grips with them, as it seems the habitat is a big clue to the likely sightings.

First came limestone walls with *Tortula muralis*, which is one of the few familiar species for some of us, curly *Ctenidium molluscum* and flattened *Neckera complanata*.

Moving on to woodland, we were in a heartland for bryophytes with 3 or 4 different habitats and thus great diversity. *Thuidium tamariscinum* is fern-like in form and a typical woodland floor species. *Brachythecium rutabulum* is very common with a more catholic taste in habitats than some. Many epiphytic species are fussy about the pH of the bark of their hosts, most preferring the more common alkalinity with old Elder and Ash trees being especially popular. Others like it slightly acid, such as Silver Birch and Oak. *Cryphaea heteromalla* is unusually sensitive to airborne pollutants, especially acid, and some populations have crashed in the recent past, though now recovering.

Chalk grassland has the characteristic *Hypnum lacunosum*. Even tighter in its requirements is *Rhodobryum roseum* – with its large rosettes, often borne singly – which is almost wholly restricted to our area, and only on the north side of old anthills in well established chalk grassland.

There is a wealth of species to be found in heath and mire – not much of that in Wiltshire so we ventured out of the county. *Polytrichum juniperinum* is dioecious and the male flowers are a dramatic ruby red. *Leucobryum glaucum* is a tussock forming species and the tussocks can be large and very old. Sharon also showed us photographs of four of the many *Sphagnum* species of bright and contrasting colours.

Then came wet habitats where some species have large leaves only one cell thick, so are prone to dehydration. Liverworts, both thalloid and leafy, are more common in wet places.

Lastly came some specialists of bare disturbed ground, such as Didymodon fallax, which is ubiquitous though it is doubtful if many of us have noticed it. We must start looking when next in a bare-ground car park.


Tortula muralis - Sharon Pilkington

Plants of Southern Portugal

Pat Woodruffe


Daucus halophilus - Pat Woodruffe

Pat went to a small area of Southern Portugal last spring to the West of the Algarve. The West-facing coast is wild and unpopulated with steep cliffs down to the crashing Atlantic, without beaches or development. On the top was a wealth of lovely plants. Pat said that the dominant palette was yellow, from alien *Acacias* planted to stabilise the fragile soil, and masses of the native *Ulex* and *Genista* spp. There was also *Halimium commutatum*, close to *Cistus* but yellow. The yellow was relieved by patches of brilliant blue *Lithodora diffusa*, growing through the others, and on bare ground there were sometimes wide mats of blue *Anagallis monelli*.


Astericus maritimus - Pat Woodruffe

The wonderful *Cistus* were already in flower late in March, including pink *C. crispus* and the big white *C. ladinifer*, each flower with its five chocolate drops in the centre. Pat said that the *Cistus* foliage was deliciously fragrant, though it took her a while to track down the source of the scent. She was lucky - or clever – enough to find the dramatic scarlet and yellow, and leafless *Cytinus hypocistis*, parasitic on the roots of white *Cistus.*

One of the more remarkable plants was *Drosophyllum lusitanicum*, which has a rosette of 30cm spikes, with a 3cm lemon yellow flower. And yet it is a sundew, with sticky glands all over the spikes and flower stalk.

Pat then took us to the mountains which should be a landscape of scattered cork oaks. Unfortunately the oaks are now unusual, replaced by clear-felled scrub and Eucalypt plantations. She showed us piles of the cut cork, and how the stripped trees were a natural red colour and painted with the year of harvesting. In the upland places there were stands of bright yellow Lupins, probably grown as a crop, and a lovely blowsy pink Peony. Pat said that 16 of the 17 species of *Antirrhinum* came from Iberia and showed us a photo of one of them, of a solid brilliant cerise colour. There was a handsome *Astragalus* with big decorative pods, and a pretty pink *Anthyllis*. To finish, we had some pictures of Monocots: *Scillas*, *Narcissus* and *Romulea*.

The standard of photography illustrating both talks was exceptional, and often gasp-worthy. Sharon was often less than an inch from her damp and chilly little wonders, but all was in focus and pin sharp. Pat, too, managed to have her foreground subjects displaying themselves wonderfully well, every hair and vein glistening, at the same time showing the sunlit landscape behind. It was a feast of an afternoon.

Thank you

Rosemary Duckett.


Gynandiris sisyrinchium - Pat Woodruffe

Brown Hairstreak - Steve Covey

Saturday 19 January 2008

Changing Fortunes of Wiltshire Butterflies

Michael Fuller

Mike explained that the overall aim of his talk was to "tie in the habitat to the butterfly".

The overhead digital projector made an unsuccessful attempt to sabotage the talk. However, this was no problem for such a well-equipped venue as Marlborough – we just decamped to the lab!

The number of Wiltshire butterfly species has decreased from 54 in 1900 to 45 now – of which 22 are still common and widespread. Mike reminded us of the general topography of Wilts, and went on to list the species and their food-plants. I will pick out some highlights.

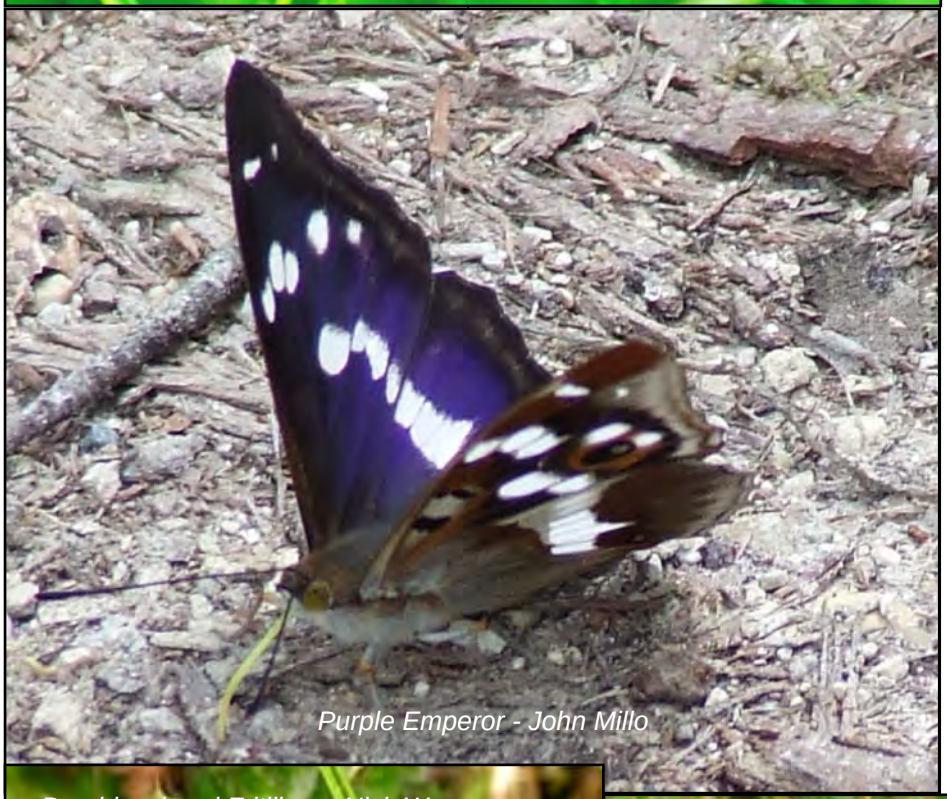
Adonis Blues - Richard Aisbitt

The hairstreaks I find fascinating – possibly because I have not seen any yet! The purple is the commonest and feeds high in oaks on honeydew. The green has a wide distribution although its population fluctuates. It's larva feeds on rockrose, gorse, broom and Dyer's Greenweed. The Brown Hairstreak

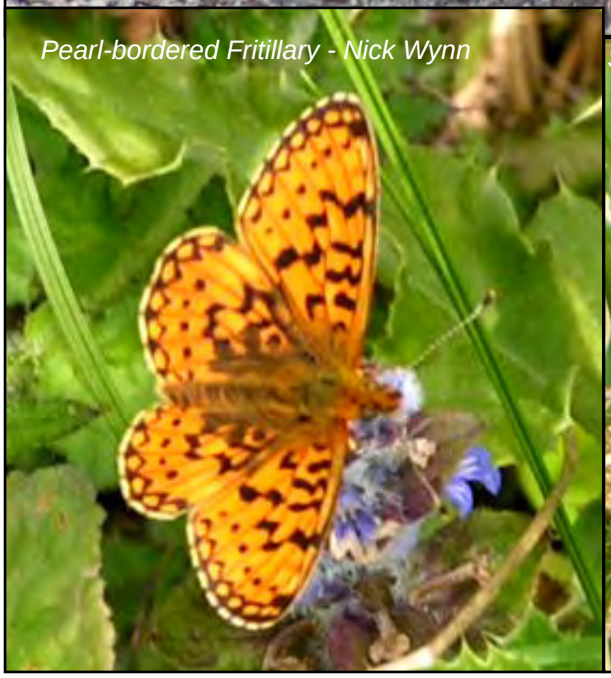
Brown Hairstreak egg on Blackthorn - Wayne Clinch

lays eggs on blackthorn, which are sought by the intrepid butterfly recorder during the winter months! The adults congregate on ash. The butterfly's headquarters are Braydon Forest and the Tidworth area. The white-letter hairstreak has a sparse but widespread distribution and is found on English Elm and Wych elm. Surprisingly Dutch Elm Disease seems to have made very little difference to its status.

Duke of Burgundy - Hilary Cotter



Purple Emperor - John Millo



Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Nick Wynn

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary - Mike Fuller

The Blues of course are a big feature of the Wiltshire list because of the chalk grassland. The Adonis Blue has done well since the 90s, especially in the South. Now the climate is warmer they have adapted to areas of taller vegetation.

The dainty Duke of Burgundy is declining rapidly, but there is still a good population at Morgan's Hill, and Wiltshire is their headquarters. Their food plants are cowslip or primrose leaves.

Bentley Wood, in the southeast corner of the county, must be mentioned for its wonderful collection of rarer butterflies – Purple Emperor and both Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. Both the frits feed and lay eggs on violets, in a woodland habitat that is not too shaded. They are rare because coppicing has largely stopped.

The Clouded Yellow has been an intermittent widespread immigrant for years, but now they have been proved to be overwintering in Hampshire. They occur earlier and in greater numbers at West Yatton Down – so may be overwintering there too.

If you want to find out more, Mike is the author of a beautiful and informative book on Wiltshire butterflies, "The Butterflies of Wiltshire, Their History, Status and Distribution", (Ed. Beatrice Gillam, Pisces Publications 1995, ISBN 1-874357-06-4).

Simon Young

Saturday 1 December 2007

Wildlife of Namibia

Speaker: Barbara Last

17 members came to see Barbara's pictures and hear her talk about a recent visit to Namibia. The meeting was held at Langford Lakes, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's reserve at Steeple Langford, which was felt to be an ideal venue in the south of the county. Hopefully, we shall use it again and perhaps find another central venue so that members do not always have to make the journey to Marlborough for the winter meetings.

Namibia has enjoyed independence for almost 20 years but, prior to this, was under South African control, having been seized during World War I. From early C19 the country was occupied by Germany and the discovery of diamonds in 1908 led to an influx of Europeans.

Barbara's stay included time in the Etosha National Park, where she saw many of the large animals, including cheetah, giraffe, lions and elephant. The cheetah were so close that she was able to confirm that they really do purr! For obvious reasons, getting out of the buses to photograph plants in this area was not permitted and most of Barbara's close - ups of plants came from the desert regions. Trees do not make much impact on the landscape in this part of the world but the Quiver Tree (*Aloe dichotoma*) is present in quantity and derives its common name form the fact that local people made quivers from the hollowed stems. Barbara brought some plantlets back – which form on the edge of the leaves – and offered one to the group. Simon has it in his care and we trust that it will grow well. We also saw pictures of many fossilised tree trunks, which looked surprisingly recent in appearance. Clearly the area has a history of tree-cover.

Quiver Tree - Barbara Last

Welwitschia - Barbara Last

Living in an area which experiences zero rainfall is, perhaps, the ultimate challenge for a plant and Barbara's excellent slides showed us just how they are able to cope. Strategies included 'the woolly vest effect' employed by *Helichrysum roseoniverum*, the ability to position leaves or cladodes edge on to the sun, as adopted by The Dollar Plant *(Zygophyllum stapffii*) which is endemic to the Namib desert, and plants such as *Arthraerua leubnitziae* which have lost their leaves and use green stems both to store water and to photosynthesise. Many of the plants relied on the moisture brought in on Atlantic fogs but *Acanthosicyos horridus*, an endemic gourd had an extensive root system which tapped underground aquifers. Carbon dating has revealed that the clone was of the order of 8000 years old – quite incredible. Another plant with a very long life span was *Welwitschia mirabilis* which is thought to survive

2000 years. This remarkable plant was found by Dr Welwitsch in 1859 and he is reputed to have fallen over in amazement because it looked so like a stranded octopus. In fact, it has just two large leaves which, over the course of time, become shredded to give the octopus-like effect. It is coniferous and bears many seeds that are distributed by wind.


Devil's Thorn - Barbara Last

Many of the plants illustrated had substantial prickles; it follows that those plants able to survive these conditions will undoubtedly be much sought by the local fauna and therefore need a good line of defence. *Commiphera saxicola*, the Paperbark Tree adopted this strategy as did *Blepharis grossa* and *Tribulus zeyheri* – aptly known as The Devil's Thorn.

Some time was spent exploring the coastline, especially the Skeleton Coast, where many shipwrecks occur. In places the sand was deep pink with garnet crystals and in others commercial salt production was taking place. We were saddened to hear that the seabed is being dredged in a quest for diamonds and the resulting disturbance is killing the fish and other creatures. This, in turn, reduces the available food for many animals including sea lions, which are at the top of the food chain and are dying of starvation.

We all know that Barbara's knowledge and interests extend well beyond the plant kingdom and we were delighted to see photographs of termites and of Tokki-Tokki beetles. The latter stand on their heads and allow water vapour to condense and run down their bodies to their mouths. The hope of witnessing this remarkable sight was one of the triggers which persuaded Barbara to join this trip.

We thank her for sharing her experiences with us and look forward to hearing about her next adventure – to Svelbard.

Pat Woodruffe


Mesembryanthemum - Barbara Last

Sharon explains ...

Great Bradley Wood

Sunday 16 March 2008

Leader: Sharon Pilkington

Despite rain and no prospect of much improvement in the weather, about a dozen hardy souls joined Sharon to look at mosses and liverworts in this ancient acid woodland on greensand. Good conditions for bryophytes, if not for botanists! Sharon provided us all with a very useful list of the species found in the woodland by habitat, with brief descriptions.

Progress was even slower than our usual pace with frequent stops to look at bryophytes on the banks and tree trunks by the track. Our first find was *Mnium hornum*, a very common moss of acid woodland, here covering a bank and the bases of trees. In the same area we also found *Thuidium tamariscinum*, a very distinctive bright yellowish-green moss. Its shoots are flattened and often thrice-pinnately branched, giving them a feathery 'frond-like' appearance. *Kindbergia praelonga* (formerly *Eurhynchium praelongum*) occurred too. This common moss, often the only one growing in deep, dryish shade, is pinnately branched and has stem leaves much bigger than those of the branches. We also looked at *Fissidens taxifolius*, only about 1.5 cm high. The genus is distinctive because of the two-ranked arrangement of the leaves; their flattened shoots resembling miniature fern fronds. There is a boat-shaped clasping portion at the base of each leaf. In contrast, on the other side of the track, we found the much taller dark green *Polytrichum formosum* with its rigid pointed leaves spreading out from its stems. The mosses *Dicranella heteromalla*, *Dicranum scoparium*, *Plagiomnium undulatum* and *Hypnum cupressiforme* and the leafy liverworts *Lepidozia reptans* and *Diplophyllum albicans* were also growing on banks. All were closely examined and Sharon showed us their distinguishing characteristics. Further down, we also saw the red stems of *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* and the wavy leaves of *Atrichum undulatum.* The world of bryophytes has its share of invasive alien species too and one example, *Campylopus introflexus*, was growing in profusion in places. This is particularly distinctive when dry because of the white 'stars' formed by the divergent hair points of its upper leaves.

Although the track was muddy and, in parts, more like a stream bed at the time of our visit, there were some mosses growing in vegetation by the side; these included *Calliergonella cuspidata*, *Cratoneuron filicinum* and *Pseudoscleropodium purum*. The first of these is found both in marshes and in chalk grassland. Its most characteristic feature is the spear-like shoot tips resulting from the leaves being tightly rolled in bud.

Epiphytic species were also abundant, with *Isothecium myosuroides* forming loose masses at the base of tree trunks. The shoots have a tassel-like (mouse-tail) habit, hence its specific name. We diverted briefly from the track to look at the bryophytes on some hazel. Hazel, which has alkaline bark, often carries

a diverse epiphytic flora, although that of elder can exceed its richness. We saw fruiting *Orthotrichum affine* with its ridged capsules concealed amongst its upper leaves and compared it with the small neat cushions of *Ulota crispa*. The capsules of *Ulota* are "exserted" on short stalks (seta). *Cryphaea heteromalla* and the leafy liverworts *Frullania dilatata* and *Radula complanata* were also seen.


Polytrichum formosum - Richard Aisbitt

Returning to the track, we headed down towards the stream to see what we could find. The thalloid liverwort *Pellia epiphylla* was growing on the track banks and another thalloid species, *Conocephalum conicum*, which has a wide, shining thallus with distinctive air pores on the surface, grew next to the stream. The flattened shoots and large translucent leaves of *Hookeria lucens*, looking rather like a leafy liverwort, were much admired. The leaf cells are so large that they can be seen with the naked eye. Other mosses found here were *Thamnobryum alopecurum* and *Rhizomnium punctatum*. Sharon risked a soaking in her search for *Trichocolea tomentella*, an uncommon liverwort that she had previously found by the stream, but water levels were high and it was nowhere to be seen – a pity, because it looks very interesting in my book! We did, however, see another leafy liverwort, *Plagiochila asplenioides*. One member of the group almost lost a boot in the mud, but was safely extricated and we returned to our cars without further mishap.

We had a fascinating morning looking at some beautiful plants. If we got a bit damp in the process, the weather did not succeed in dampening our enthusiasm! Thanks very much to Sharon for sharing her love of bryophytes and her considerable expertise.

Anne Appleyard


Thuidium tamariscinum - Richard Aisbitt

SUNDAY 27th JULY, 10:00am

Future Meeting

Clatford Arboretum – 'Trees, Especially Willows and Poplars'

Leader: Jack Oliver

This meeting is not listed in our summer programme. It is intended for members of the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI), but WBS members would be welcome as Jack's guests. Do please contact Jack beforehand if you would like to attend.

Meeting Details

"A one day meeting at the Clatford Arboretum between the A4 and the River Kennet, 2 miles west of Marlborough. Most native trees and a number of introduced taxa are represented. Some of the willows are natural, some introduced to the site. Specialist collections include *Tilias, Sorbi* endemic to the British Isles and a few conifers held for the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh World Conifer Conservation Programme. Any attention to difficult *Salix* and *Populus* taxa can therefore be diluted by other easier tree species!

Meet inside the western gate where there is parking at SU159 689 off the Clatford Road just south of the A 4. Meeting to start at 10.a.m. but latecomers would easily find the group.

Bring a packed lunch or use tourist cafes in Avebury or Marlborough.

For fuller details and maps send s.a.e. to: Jack (J.E.) Oliver, High View, Rhyls Lane, Lockeridge, Nr Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 4ED. Tel: 01672 861 251"

Extra details from Jack

Attenders will be welcome to take *Salix* and *Populus* cuttings from the 31 Willow or 22 Poplar taxa. These are all big shrub or tree species; dwarf willows do not compete with our lush vegetation (including 8 foot nettles).

Eared Willow (*Salix aurita*) is continuing to diminish in Wiltshire and we are not able to re-find it in Savernake Forest or anywhere else in this area. If anyone could bring a small branch showing the prominent raised and furrowed striations on the wood under the bark, it would be appreciated.

Rusty Sallow [(*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) "…. quite the commonest of our willows (British Isles) …. abundance everywhere in Britain and Ireland except Norfolk …."] is not common in our immediate vicinity. Trees introduced and naturally occurring in and around the arboretum (four or five only) are not characteristic, and may all be hybrids or introgressed. For a start, none have the allegedly characteristic rusty hairs, even between August and October, in the open. I will bring a typical branch so as not to confuse any non-expert attenders with imponderables from the start.

Plant Anomalies

- a request for pictures and/or information

I am hoping to include something on plant anomalies in Wiltshire in the next *Wiltshire Botany*. Quite a lot of information is already available, but I need as much as possible to get a comprehensive picture. Even more, I need illustrations. So if you have any slides, photos, digital images, drawings, etc, I would be most grateful to receive them. Ditto with offers to produce drawings based on poor photos or other sources. Further, how about looking out for such anomalies this summer, describing what you see, photographing or drawing it and sending the results to me by the end of September?

To clarify, I am thinking of abnormalities occurring naturally in wild or cultivated plants in Wiltshire. I am not planning to include specifically cultivated variants, or abnormalities produced by fungi, bacteria, etc. However, if you are not sure, send it anyway. I may well include uncertain items, with an invitation to readers to throw light on them.

John Presland, Editor, Wiltshire Botany

Writing for Wiltshire Botany

I would very much like to have a wider range of people writing for *Wiltshire Botany*. If there is something you've thought of writing, do act on it. Help is available if you are uncertain about composition. If you do not want to attempt full articles, but would still like to do a bit of writing, I am considering a new feature in which information about botany in Wiltshire written up in other publications is summarised. I would particularly welcome offers to help with this - some material already awaits them. Finally, if you know someone else who you think would have an interesting contribution to make, do encourage them, or let me know about them.

John Presland, Editor, Wiltshire Botany

Membership

We welcome new members, beginners and experts alike. If you are interested, please feel free to come to a meeting or two before you commit yourself. Subscriptions and contact details go to:

Lesley Wallington

6 Radnor Place, Melksham,
Wiltshire SN12 6DJ
Telephone: 01225 709560

Email: jwallington@toucansurf.com

Subscriptions (new rates):

Ordinary Member	£10.00 per year
Joint Membership	£15.00 per year
Life Membership	£100
	(Family £150)

A Rare Sawfly in Wiltshire?

Almost nine years ago a single female of the fern stem-boring sawfly *Blasticotoma filiceti* was found in north Wales . In August 2005, Mike Howe and Guy Knight visited the site to look for the sawfly again.

Adults of *Blasticotoma* are rather inactive and especially difficult to find, apparently preferring rainy conditions.

However, the larvae are very easily detected by the presence of conspicuous balls of foam on the stems of the ferns in which they develop. A four-hour search revealed 14 such foam balls, all on Lady Fern *Athyrium filix-femina,* but none on other ferns. The foam balls found (illustrated) were between 20 and 30mm in diameter and were generally positioned towards the base of the plant, one, however, was right at the top of a frond. The foam has a sticky consistency, unlike the watery cuckoo spit produced by froghopper nymphs. The leaves of mined stems were generally slightly brownish at the edges.

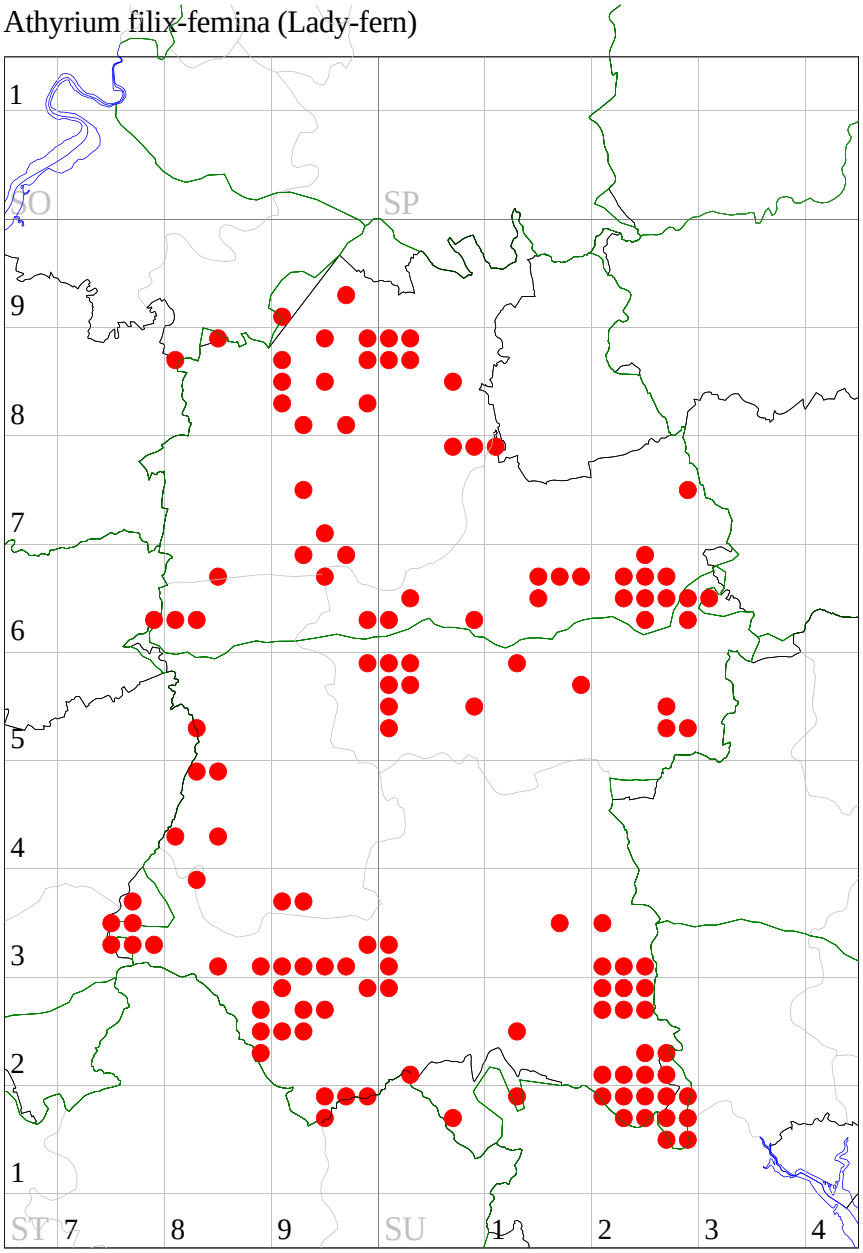
The wide (but thin) scatter of records in Britain could indicate that *Blasticotoma filiceti* awaits discovery elsewhere. A careful search of fern-rich areas, particularly during late July-August, for larval foam-balls would seem the best method to adopt.

(Extracted from an article by Guy Knight & Mike Howe in the Sawfly Study Group Newsletter, March 2006)

John Grearson, the Wiltshire county recorder for sawflies, would like help to find if there are any of these sawflies in Wiltshire.

Its host, the Lady Fern, is supposed to grow in acid conditions, and so should not be suited to most of Wiltshire. However, I have several times found plants scattered in damp woodlands on chalk, so this fern seems to take little notice of the subsoil. Its distribution map shows a widespread occurrence with hotspots where one might expect (each dot shows its presence in a 2km square).

Athyrium filix-femina (Lady-fern)



If you do find suspicious foam balls on Lady Fern stems, John would very much like to know. In the first instance, please could you send him a photograph? If a number of plants are showing the foam-balls please send a whole frond to him in the post. He will photograph the larva itself and also attempt to rear it to the adult stage. This would be a one-off exercise to prove the identification conclusively.

Foam ball from Blasticotoma - Guy Knight

John's contact details are:

John Grearson
10 Eastfield
Ashton Keynes
Swindon
Wiltshire SN6 6PR

Telephone: 01285 862159
Email:
grearsonkj@waitrose.com

Wiltshire Botanical Society Committee

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Lesley Wallington	Treasurer	01225 709560	jwallington@toucansurf.com
Pat Woodruffe	Meetings Secretary	01794 884436	pmw.bentley@waitrose.com

Summer Programme

Wed 7 May	Great High Croft and Hang Wood
Thu 22 May	Clattinger Farm - with Hereford Bot Soc.
Thu 29 May	Knighton Downs SSSI, Burnt Orchid, Early Gentian, Field Fleawort and other gems
Sat 7 June	Martin Down with Hants and Dorset groups
Sat 14 June	Salisbury Plain - Silk Hill
June 28 - July 2	North York Moors National Park
Sat 12 July	West Yatton Down,
Sun 20 July	Scotchel Reserve, Pewsey,
Tue 29 July	Winsley, Murhill Reserve
Thu 7 Aug	Tilshead arable land
Wed 20 Aug	Silkwood and Westonbirt Arboretum
Sat 6 Sep	New Forest - Stony Moors and Holmsley
Sat 6 Sep	New Forest - Hatchet Pond
Sun 7 Sep	Calshot. Mudflat and saltmarsh
Sun 12 Oct	Webb's Wood Fungus Foray
Sun 2 Nov	Bentley Wood Fungus Foray

For details, see our meetings leaflet or the Wiltshire Botanical Society website at http://www.communigate.co.uk/wilts/wiltshirebotanicalsociety/

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.bentley@waitrose.com)

Pat Woodruffe

From the Editor

Our interests spread more widely during the winter; we have had meetings on fungi, bryophytes and insects in addition to the more usual emphasis on flowering plants and ferns. Should a botanical society do this? We have the excuse that green plants support all other living things in one way or another. The effects are not one way; the grazers and parasites affect plants by controlling ecological climaxes and by giving special attention to their chosen victims. Please let us know whether you agree with the balance of subjects for our meetings.

Our summer programme will give you opportunities to get out and about, improving those identification skills. There are plenty of visits within Wiltshire, but we are also spending two days in the New Forest and have our field trip to the North York Moors. Our meetings explore the special features of the site and always have knowledgeable leaders; some visits concentrate on systematic recording. If you have ideas or requests for particular types of meeting, please let Pat know. Also, send her your suggestions for places to visit.

Do you feel frustrated because you cannot get to meetings on weekdays? Or is it the other way round, and you cannot come on weekends? Let us know because it may be possible to repeat meetings at a different time of the week.

The next newsletter should be sent out at the beginning of October, so **all copy to me by 14 September please.** Thank you in advance to the worthy people who will write these reports. Do send photographs if you can.

Do you have an opinion or information to share? I am happy to publish letters, news items,and short articles.

Please send material by post to:

84 Goddard Avenue
Swindon
Wilts SN1 4HT

or even better, by email: richardaisbitt@yahoo.co.uk

Richard Aisbitt

Cover picture: Wild Daffodils - Barbara Last