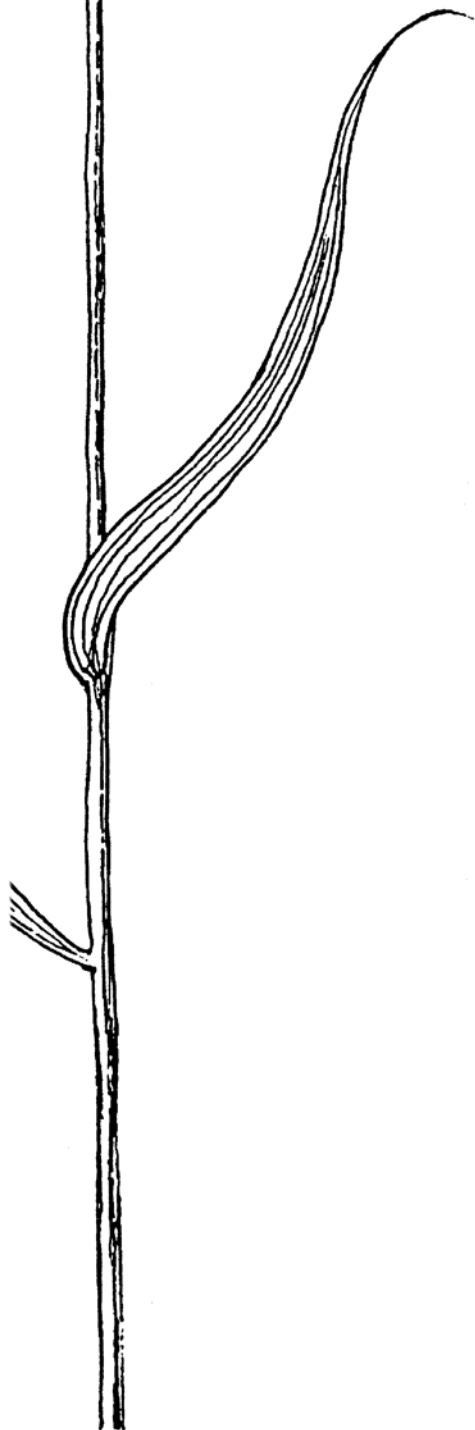


# NEWSLETTER

Issue 35

Winter 2009-2010

# WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY



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*Mycena incarnata*

October 11<sup>th</sup> 2009

## Bentley Wood Fungus Foray

Leader: Malcolm Storey

A very healthy group meet in Bentley Wood to survey the fungi this autumn. This was a joint meeting with members of the Salisbury Natural History Society and Friends of Bentley Wood. All were very grateful to Malcolm for agreeing to lead the foray when it was realised that

**A species of  
*Peronospora*,  
a downy  
mildew on  
Vervain  
leaves ... new  
to science!**

**Fine  
specimens of  
the Fly Agaric  
(*Amanita  
muscaria*)**

Ted Gange would be unable to do so.

During September the wood was very dry indeed and although some rain fell right at the beginning of the month, it was not sufficient to bring the fungi into full fruit. We started our searches from the Hawksgrove car park and quickly spread out into much of Compartment 23, covering Cook's Common, High Bushes, the Oil Drill Site and the Bomb Crater Pond. A goodly collection was made in about one and a half hours, including some fine specimens of the Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*). We then retreated to The Barn where tea and cakes provided the stamina needed for Malcolm to go through the finds and provide us with the names.

Over thirty different macro-fungi were found – not a huge number but a goodly one considering the dry conditions. These included several of the honey fungus group, seven species of *Mycena*, two boletes, a number of polypores, some *Stereum* and some *Russulas*. WBS members know all too well

that Malcolm does not confine himself to those species easily visible to the naked eye – not even ones with specs on. On this occasion he collected two ascomycetes, *Erysiphe sparsa* on Guelder Rose leaves and *Phyllactinia fraxini* on Ash leaves. *Melampsora populnea* was found on Aspen, a member of the *Mucorales* growing on a toadstool, an orange immature myxomycete named *Lycogala terrestre* and a member of the *Protosteliales*, *Ceratiomyxa fruticulosa*.

One final entry in his list takes us back to the bryophyte meeting we had in the wood in April 2009. Then he collected a species of *Peronospora*, a downy mildew on Vervain leaves and this proved to be new to science! He has found it in three different locations and, self-effacing as ever, he declares that it must be quite common when you know where to look. It's knowing that is the hard part!

*Pat Woodruffe*



Tea and cakes provided stamina for Malcolm to go through the finds



17 October 2009

## Travels in South-East Asia - plants, people and cultures

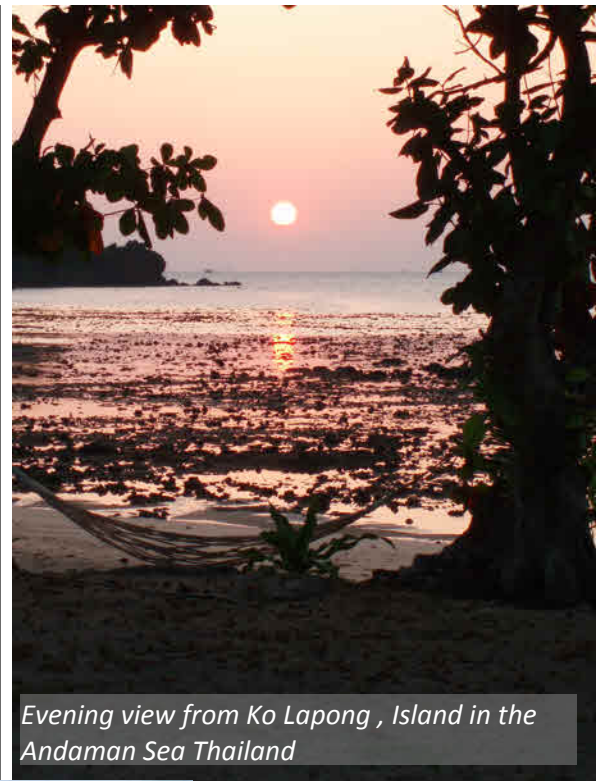
An illustrated talk by Dave  
Green

Dave's travels over the last few years have produced photos of some spectacular and mouth watering sights and locations. Dave gave us a précis of two years of his travels covering Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. He set the scene by explaining that to get closer to the cultures of each country, he travelled with a company that

worked with locals, therefore allowing the group (travelling with no more than 10 people) to live in and be part of local ethnic communities. This meant eating, sleeping and travelling as nearly as possible as the locals did.

Dave showed us the differing effects of these communities on the environment, such as slash and burn farming. He also showed us evocative photos of seashore paradises, visits to world heritage wet lands and fantastic limestone buttresses rising from the Sea. The locations shown may whet appetites of many members of the society to visit these exotic countries.

*Dave Green*



*Evening view from Ko Lapong , Island in the Andaman Sea Thailand*

*Laos, upland river with regenerating slash & burn habitats*

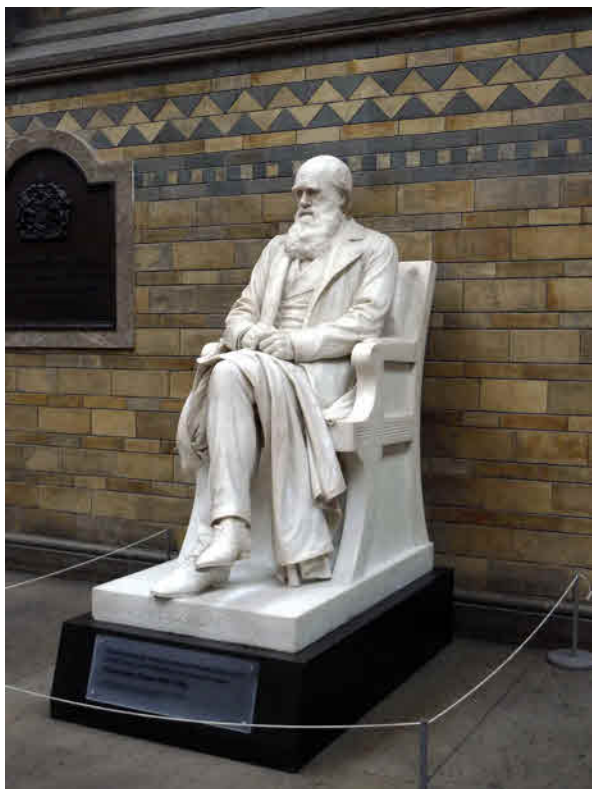


*Limestone pinnacles forming islands , Andaman sea nr Krabi Thailand*



*White Hmong near Lai Chau*





Nov 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009

## A Visit to the Natural History Museum, London

We were very fortunate to be given the opportunity to join with the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (WANHS) on a day visit to London to see the newly opened Darwin Centre at the museum. A coach had been hired for the purpose and our journey to London was stress

**... three million botanical specimens have been moved ... to ...the Darwin Centre ... stunning pictures ...**

**BUT ... a lack of botanical material on display ...**

**Photos by Pat**



free once we had achieved pick-up.

For those of us who had not visited the museum very recently it was quite an eye-opener to see how many of the exhibits had been modernised and this was particularly true of the new section where we could see into the labs and hear mini talks from the scientists who work there. Some of these talks were recorded and others were given 'in the flesh'. In the cocoon we experimented with cards which could be scanned to provide a personal online collection of video clips, images and web links for access later through our own computers. That's the theory – I have yet to achieve but Sonia managed it first time!

Alongside this high-tech approach to museum visiting are the traditional cabinets of stuffed birds, the huge dinosaur skeletons and, of course, the well-known section of a giant sequoia tree. All these old favourites are all still attracting a lot of interest from visitors. Some three million botanical specimens have been moved from the herbarium to their new home in the Darwin Centre, together with numerous animal specimens all pickled in their jars. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to look behind the scenes and it was quite amazing to be shown material that Darwin himself had collected as well as the giant squid. The tour is known as the 'spirit collection tour' because of the importance of alcohol and formalin for the preservation of all the material!

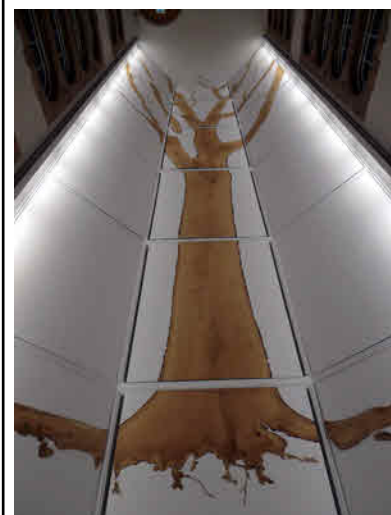
One real disappointment is the lack of botanical material on display. There is a little plant anatomy and physiology covered in the ecology section and something of the evolution of plants in the Earth Lab but although there were some stunning pictures in the Darwin Centre, they were often poorly labelled. Hopefully this will improve in time but for the moment plants seem to be best



represented by the illustrations on the ceiling of the central hall and the numerous carvings in the stonework of the older buildings. There has been one recent addition with a botanical theme -Tree – artwork by Tania Kovats on the ceiling of a gallery commissioned to commemorate the 200 years since Darwin's birth and 150 years since the publication of 'The Origin'. The work was inspired by a diagram in his Transmutation Notebook B of 1837 and expresses the concept of evolution through branching. The illustration was crafted from a 200 year old oak from Longleat and 200 saplings were planted in place of the tree as a living legacy reflecting the endurance and reach of Darwin's revolutionary idea.

Special thanks must go to Richard and Phillida Sneyd who first suggested that we might undertake this visit.

*Pat Woodruffe*



**Saturday 14 November**

## **Abnormalities in Plants**

John Presland

On a day of unpleasant weather it was good to pass the afternoon in the warm with WBS chums and with John and his wonderful photographs

Most of us were familiar with John's monograph on Abnormalities in Plants, with co-authors Jack Oliver and Martin Barber. However, being steered through the subject by John himself, with numerous examples in colour, made it all easier to absorb. The monograph had been restricted to monochrome except the covers. It was all made even more helpful and interesting as John almost invariably showed

us a photo of the normal condition, to remind us, before a photo of the abnormality.

Defining "abnormal" is nigh on impossible. There are examples of divergences from the usual form ranging from gentle variations, such as a slight colour change in the petals, up to gross distortions where the plant is barely recognisable, and this can be via things that seem weird, such as apetalous Goldilocks *Ranunculus auricomus* but which is reckoned to be within the normal range of variation. So it is a huge subject on which it is as difficult to be definitive as "what is species?"

John gave us a review of some of the more widespread abnormalities such as fasciation, proliferation (plant organs in the wrong place), chimeras and so on and also a

**... gentle variations, such as a slight colour change in the petals, up to gross distortions where the plant is barely recognisable**

**Some genera go in for a more enthusiastic display of abnormalities than others**

review of some of the very many possible causes. All his points were lavishly illustrated with splendid photographs.

Some genera go in for a more enthusiastic display of abnormalities than others, for instance Foxgloves and Plantains. John had a particularly delightful set of photographs of the extraordinary aberrant forms that Foxgloves can show.

With abnormalities, especially fasciation, there seems to be a Ron Hurst effect – many examples have been found in his garden. We do not think this is due to any magicking by Ron, but is probably a similar phenomenon to the remarkable number of botanical records from the Marlborough area, especially near where Jack Oliver lives.

*Rosemary Duckett*

## **Wild About Plants**

I am the project manager of a project called Wild About Plants which is being run by Plantlife in partnership with organisations such as Eden, The National Wildflower Centre and Defence Estates. As part of our project we are running some plant id events in 2010. These events are occurring throughout England. Please visit [www.wildaboutplants.org.uk](http://www.wildaboutplants.org.uk) to find out more. Information about the events is given below.

We have also just launched a new flower survey for children called Bee Scene. All the resources for this survey are online (visit the website above and follow link to Bee Scene). We hope this survey will inspire botanical curiosity and a new generation of botanists for the future. Perhaps this survey is something members would like to do with their grandchildren / children. This survey is being run in partnership with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

*Felicity Harris, Wild About Plants Project Manager*

## **Plant Identification Courses**

### **Plant identification – May 7<sup>th</sup> 2010**

(10am - 3pm) Langford Lakes, Nature Reserve, Nr Salisbury, Wiltshire. Participants will have the opportunity to survey a local water meadow and learn about plants that exist in this vibrant habitat. In the afternoon surveying skills will be developed further enabling participants to take part in Plantlife's National Survey, Wildflower's Count. Open to those 18 and over only. Fifteen places available. To book please download and complete our booking form. Email it to [wildaboutplants@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:wildaboutplants@plantlife.org.uk) or send it to us at Wild About Plants, Plantlife, 14 Rollestone Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP1 1DX.

### **Marvellous meadows and gorgeous grasses – June 25<sup>th</sup> 2010**

(10am - 3pm) Langford Lakes Nature Reserve, Nr Salisbury, Wiltshire. This day provides you with an opportunity to explore the world of grasses and some of the plants associated with them. Expand your grass identification skills in the morning through collecting some grass species to build your own herbarium. Develop your knowledge of meadow species in the afternoon. Open to those 18 and over only. Fifteen places available. To book please download and complete our booking form. Email it to [wildaboutplants@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:wildaboutplants@plantlife.org.uk) or send it to us at Wild About Plants, Plantlife, 14 Rollestone Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP1 1DX.



# Rangering and Rambling

A talk by Tim Kaye



Wild Leek



Henbane



Wild Peony

Tim started by telling us about his wanderings and how his interest in wild plants developed. He had a six-month placement on Flat Holm Island in the Bristol Channel, where he was dive-bombed by the huge population of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Guiding walks on the Island encouraged him to learn the plants, which included Wild Leek *Allium ampeloprasum*, Wild Peony *Paeonia mascula* (protected in a cage), Henbane *Hyoscyamus niger* and Wild Cabbage *Brassica oleracea*. The Sexton Beetle *Nicrophorus investigator* was also interesting; it is a carrion beetle which

... dive-bombed by Lesser Black-backed Gulls

... led ghost walks in the haunted farm house, school group activities, bat walks and Brownie and Cub activities

Photos by Tim



provides dead bodies for its grubs to eat, shows after-care and mates for life.

Fontwell Down SSSI near Weymouth provided Knapweed Broomrape *Orobanche elatior* and Early Gentian *Gentianella anglica*, while Dawlish Warren provided Sand Crocus *Romulea columnae*. A stay in Australia found him bedazzled by the number of plants, so he concentrated on the birds. However, the Swamp Gum or Mountain Ash *Eucalyptus regnans* is hugely tall and made a great impression.

Tim gave us a brief history of rangering, starting with Roger's Rangers, a reconnaissance force that worked for the British in the French and Indian War in Canada back in the 1750s. This was the start of a rangers tradition. One branch of the tradition stayed military, but another turned into the US Park Rangers, with "Rocky Mountain Harry" working as the first of these in Yellowstone National Park in the 1880s.

A century on, Swindon Borough Council started its ranger team in the 1980s and Tim joined at Stanton Park in 2007. He has led ghost walks in the haunted farm house, school group activities, bat walks and Brownie and Cub activities. Habitat management by the ranger volunteer team is another aspect of his varied job. This includes welcome work at the Quarry Wildlife Garden (SSSI and LNR),

just out of my back door. He also surveys and monitors Swindon sites, for instance Barbury Castle (Marsh Fritillary, Adonis Blue), Coate Water (Golden Dock, now gone, but Tim is leading a WBS visit there this summer. Will we re-find it? Also Broad-leaved Helleborine), Stanton Park (Green-flowered Helleborine) and other places.

He said that he had Gypsy blood, which explained the wandering. Park your van for a while, Tim.

Richard Aisbitt



Rocky Mountain Harry





## The Wessex Bryology Group's Meetings

Quite a few members have taken advantage of the opportunity to join Sharon and Andrew and learn to identify some more mosses this winter. Both leaders are excellent teachers and never seem to tire of repeating the basics to those of us who are finding that learning does not come as easily as it used to!

In October Joy joined a very small group at Jones's Mill on a very wet day when *Cryphaea* species were identified as well as *Lophocolea heterophylla* on elder. The liverwort, *Conocepalum conicum* was seen under water by a bridge and, after some searching, a



*Homalothecium sericeum*

species of *Sphagnum*, which is a rarity for this area.

The groups that Anne, Sue and I have joined have been of about a dozen enthusiasts drawn together from three or four counties. In total, a considerable number must have attended since it was not a matter of 'the same faces every time'.

Before Christmas we had a rather chilly meeting at Stourhead and spent time looking for specimens on trees, banks and in damp grasslands as well as spending quite a bit of time in the churchyard investigating the gravestones and other memorials.



*Orthotrichum anomalum*

At the joint meeting with WBS, held at Martin Down, we had the chance to look at some plants that are just about beginning to sound and look familiar. We found ourselves trying to differentiate *Orthotrichum* from *Ulota* and names such as *Rhytidiadelphus*, *Kindbergia* and *Isothecium* were starting to fall in to place – for a few hours, at least. In amongst these finds were some interesting new ones: *Orthotrichum pulchellum* with its beautiful capsules that are reminiscent of a folded parasol, *Nowellia curvifolia* – an uncommon leafy liverwort that grows on decaying tree trunks – and numerous others. These



*Rhodobryum roseum*

**It was not a matter of 'the same faces every time'**

**Getting to grips with bryophytes involves a lot of time and patience**

**Photos by Pat**



*Fissidens taxifolia*

specimens were found mainly in mature woodland to the north of the main reserve in Vernditch Chase whilst on the grassland near the car park we were acquainted with two relatively common species, *Homalothecium lutescens* and *Calliergonella cuspidata* as well as a small leafy liverwort, *Leiocolea turbinata*, a very delicate plant that grows directly on the chalk.

By the time we arrived at Melbury Down in February, our confidence was building – only to be dashed by an array of new (to us) chalk grassland species and some others which were more at home in healthland but grew here in leached soils. Confusion set in, for me at least! As well as the three species of chalk grassland mentioned above – which we could recognise at least as previous acquaintances – there was the splendid *Rhodobryum roseum* on anthills, and the beautiful *Hylocomium splendens* with red stems and a branching habit reminiscent of *Thuidium*.



*Hylocomium splendens*

Like many things in life, getting to grips with bryophytes involves a lot of time and patience. Clearly Sharon and Andrew have amassed their extensive knowledge after years of hard work and we must be very grateful to them for sharing this with us and guiding us with such patience.

*Pat Woodruffe (text & photos)*



Elephant Hawkmoth



6 February 2010

## Pink Ladies of the Night

Barbara Last

Moths? Not exactly botanical, but according to Barbara they have a similar appeal. She talked to ten of us about them and showed us her beautiful photographs. The advantage of moths is that, unlike plants, they come to you! They also have



Garden Tiger

the same fragile and detailed beauty as a flower ... and identification is a challenge to match botany. It is amazing that so many of us are unaware of the diversity of this night-time wildlife - there are at least 2000 macro-moths in the UK, and many more micro-moths, which are generally just a bit smaller ... and Barbara made the point that not many of them eat clothes!

Barbara began with a picture of one of the largest and most spectacular moths in the UK - the pink Elephant Hawk-moth, so called because its caterpillar has some resemblance to the pachyderm in its name. When

**... it can cause the front of its body to swell up like an elephant's head ...**

**The Scarlet Tiger Moth ... can apparently make a sound to deter bats.**

**Photos: Barbara Last**

threatened it can cause the front of its body to swell up like an elephant's head, with eye-like spots. Gardeners are not always keen to see this caterpillar, as it is partial to Fuchsia, among other plants. It usually lays a single egg on Willowherb species.

Elephant Hawk larva



We learned about the differences between moths and butterflies that are generally acknowledged - the antennae of the male moth are feathery, whereas the butterfly's are not. There is also a frenulum, a small hair, that joins the wings on a moth. Moths generally fly at night, although there are some day flyers such as the Five-spot and Six-spot Burnets and Mother Shipton, as well as the red and black Cinnabar Moth that feeds almost exclusively on Ragwort.

Much of the talk referred to the survival methods that moths use, as they can be a tasty morsel for a bird or a bat. Some feed on Euonymus, and so taste unpleasant; some release pheromones which are a deterrent. Others are brightly coloured, which warns that they

Canary Thorn



taste unpleasant, whereas some (Beautiful Carpet and Clouded Border) have caterpillars that are disguised as bird droppings - a useful camouflage. Other disguises include the Plume Moth (looks like a feather), Clearwing Moths (look like other insects), Buff-tip Moth (broken twig lookalike), Purple Thorn (dead leaf). Many of the caterpillars look like twigs; others are spectacularly flamboyant. The Scarlet Tiger Moth, which feeds on a wide variety of plants, including Comfrey, can apparently make a sound to deter bats.

Some other interesting moth tales followed.

- The magnificent Emperor Moth has four eyespots to deter birds - it can also fly a kilometre in ten minutes if it detects a potential mate!
- Wax moths, closely related to clothes moths, ruin beehives by spoiling the honeycomb.
- The Yellowtail brushes its eggs with its tail in order to deposit irritant hairs on the eggs as protection.
- The names themselves conjure up varied images - Burnished Brass, Beautiful Silver-Y, Chocolate Tip, Scalloped Oak, Bright-line Brown-eye, Flame, Setaceous Hebrew Character..... many of the fantastic names were given by Victorian vicars.

Barbara records the moths she traps; last year there were more than 400, and she can spend a whole day identifying her night's treasure.

It was an inspiring talk - I plan to start trapping this summer.

Jane Brown



Thursday, 25 March 2010

## Lichen Workshop - an introduction to identification

Lesley Balfe

A group of twelve plus a baby met on an overcast day to learn about lichens from Lesley Balfe. We spent an informative morning looking at the lichens on the trees in the grounds of Urchfont Manor.

Lichens are organisms that have a symbiotic relationship with an alga and a fungus. There are around 1900 in Britain. Some are very host specific and are only found on stone or on bark or on soil, some need acid or alkali, some require shade others light, some prefer dry

environments others like it damp. Some lichens are not particular and are found in a variety of habitats. When there was high air pollution in towns from smoke they were found less in towns. In Wiltshire the lichens can be limited due to the use of nitrates and over-grazing.

The classification of lichens has changed a great deal as more is known about them, they also have a numbering scheme which does not change. Lesley explained and showed us how identification is assisted by the use of acid and alkali which on some species produces an indicative reaction. We looked with lenses, but serious identification of a wider range of species needs microscopes.

Most lichens do not have common names, but we saw *Evernia prunastri* which is also known as oakmoss, *Xanthoria parietina* the common orange

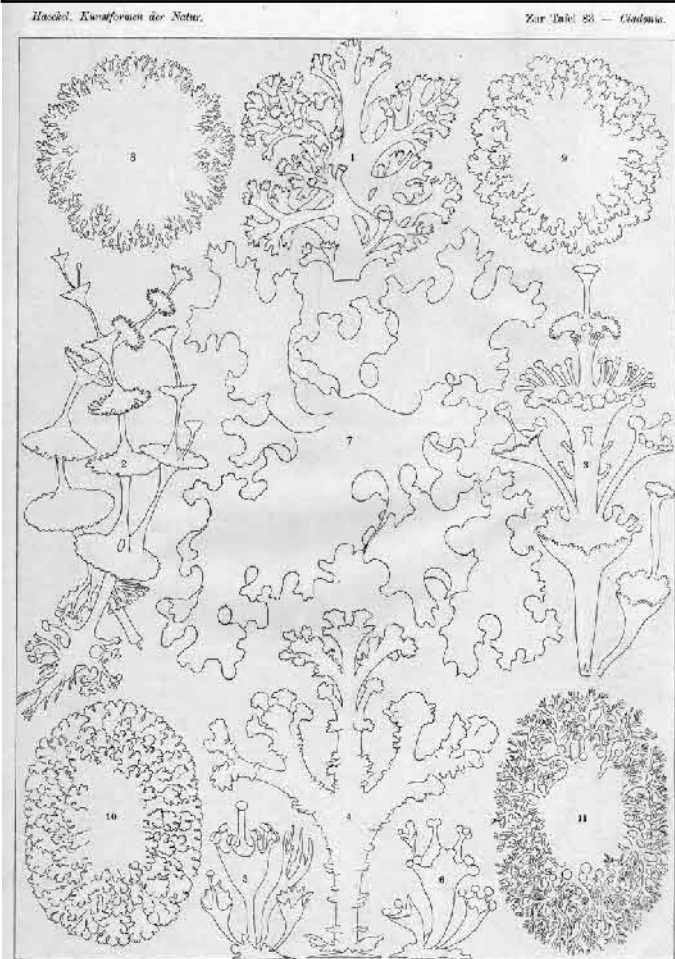
lichen. Other lichens identified included *Diploicia canescens*, *Lecidella scabra*, *Melanelixia fuliginosa*, *Phlyctis argena*, *Punctelia subrudecta* and *Ramalina farinacea*.

By 12.30 the rain set in so we ended what was a fascinating and informative workshop.

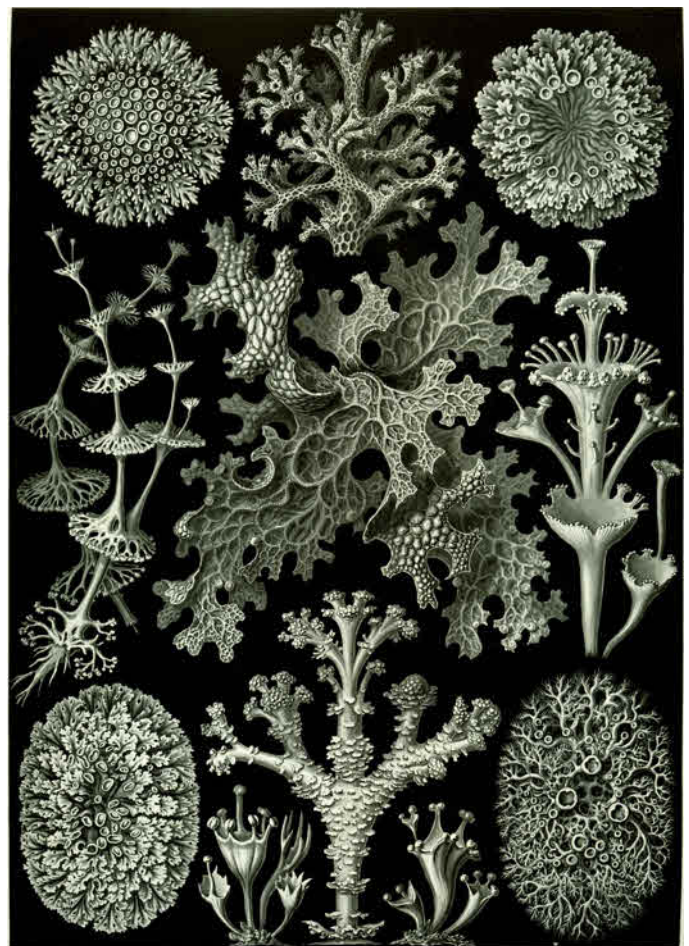
Sonia Heywood

Editor's note: it seems that lichens are reclassified and renamed as often as vascular plants; this includes splitting up the huge genus *Parmelia*. Those of you who have studied lichens with older books might know *Punctelia subrudecta* as *Parmelia subrudecta* and *Melanelixia fuliginosa* as *Melanelia fuliginosa* or *Parmelia glabrata* subsp. *fuliginosa*.

Sonia found this wonderful old engraving of lichens by Haeckel, showing lichens in fanciful idealised forms. Would you recognise any? I would only manage number 7.



1. *Cladonia retipora* (Floerke) = *Cladia retipora* (Labill.) Nyl.
2. *Cladonia perfoliata* (Hooker) = *Cladoniaceae* sp.?
3. *Cladonia verticillata* (Achard) = *Cladonia cervicornis* ssp. *verticillata* (Hoffm.) Ahti
4. *Cladonia squamosa* (Hoffmann) = *Cladonia squamosa* (Scop.) Hoffm.
5. *Cladonia fimbriata* (Fries) = *Cladonia fimbriata* (L.) Fr.
6. *Cladonia cornucopiae* (Fries) = *Cladoniaceae* sp.?
7. *Sticta pulmonaria* (Achard) = *Lobaria pulmonaria* (L.) Hoffm.
8. *Parmelia stellaris* (Fries) (non (L.) Ach.: preoccupied) = *Physcia aipolia* (Ehrh. ex Humb.) Förmr.
9. *Parmelia olivacea* (Achard) = *Melanelia olivacea* (L.) Essl.
10. *Parmelia caperata* (Achard) = *Flavoparmelia caperata* (L.) Hale
11. *Hagenia crinalis* (Schleicher) = *Anaptychia crinalis* (Schleich.) Vězda



The 83rd plate from Ernst Haeckel's "Kunstformen der Natur" (1904), depicting organisms classified as Lichenes.





25 MARCH 2010

## Lichen Workshop, Urchfont Manor

Leader Lesley Balfe

A most rewarding meeting in the grounds of this ancient country mansion exploring a variety of trees and a wall turned up at least 25 species of lichen. A lichen is an organism in which an alga and a fungus live together as though a single entity, forming a body called the thallus.

We were shown how lichen thalli can have several different forms. Firstly, there are crustose lichens, which are in a flat layer attached closely to the surface on which they grow - like *Phlyctis argena* shown here. Leprose lichens have what looks like a powdery layer, as in *Lepraria incana*. Foliose lichens consist of horizontal flat or flattish plates like *Punctelia subrudecta*. Finally, fruticose lichens, have leaf-like bodies often rising vertically or obliquely from a collection of smaller plates on the surface. The leaf-like shapes can have a variety of forms. In *Ramalina farinacea* shown here they are finely branched.

... least 25 species of lichen ...

... Potassium hydroxide was put on these areas, which then turned yellow and finally red, characteristic of this species. ...

Photos by John

Lichens have a number of types of reproductive bodies. We were shown apothecia, which are flattish or rounded projections with a raised rim like those of *Lecidella elaeochroma* here. The rim can be the same colour as the surrounding thallus, as in *Lecidella*, or the same colour as the central disc, as in *Tephromela atra*. In some species this similarity in colour to the structure inside or outside makes the rim difficult to see, which is the case with *Tephromela*. *Punctelia subrudecta* has soralia, which are in irregular powdery clusters. Podetia are another type, where the fruitbodies are borne on tubular projections, often expanded like a trumpet at the end, as in what is probably *Cladonia fimbriata* here.

Lichens cannot always be distinguished reliably from their appearance in the field. Some need to be examined under a microscope, while others need chemical tests. The centre of the photo of *Phlyctis argena* shows some marks from one such test. Potassium hydroxide was put on these areas, which then turned yellow and finally red, characteristic of this species.

Many thanks to Lesley for guiding us so expertly through this difficult natural history territory.

John Presland

*Cladonia fimbriata*



*Lecidella elaeochroma*



*Lepraria incana*



*Phlyctis argena*



*Punctelia subrudecta*



*Ramalina farinacea*





Barbara Last visited Namakwaland in South Africa last year with Bob Gibbons, Geoff Crane And Mike Raymakers . She has sent us this poem and two beautiful photographs.

## Fifteen Intrepid Botanists.

Fifteen intrepid botanists, with Bob and Geoff and Mike,  
Set out for darkest Africa to see what they could seek.  
They saw a lot of flowers, pink, white and orange and purples quite a few,  
Those fifteen intrepid botanists, with Bob, and Geoff and Mike.

There were hartebeests and wildebeests and antelopes galore,  
They even glimpsed a bat eared fox that left us wanting more,  
A gravid grasshopper a crawling on the grass,  
A three horned viper, a puff adder on the pass.

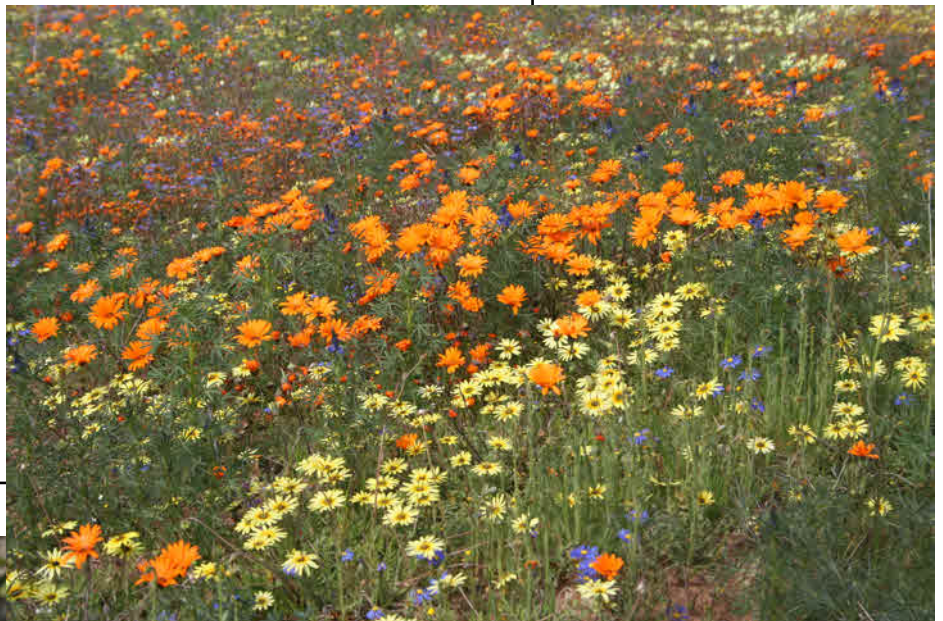
Oh those fifteen intrepid botanists with Bob and Geoff and Mike.  
Of birds there were a plenty, on rocks and on the wire,  
Egrets, ibis and flamingos, enough to quite inspire,  
Pied crows and yellow weavers, and a secretary bird,  
A long-tailed sugar bird and cranes that everybody heard.

Oh those fifteen intrepid botanists with Bob and Geoff and Mike.

One day we climbed the rugged  
rocks, where Bushmen had  
expired  
And left their little hieroglyphs  
and pictures most inspired.  
We waded through the torrents  
full of crocodiles no doubt  
Although we didn't see any, I'm  
sure they were about.

These fifteen intrepid botanists  
with Bob and Geoff and Mike.

*Barbara Last*







## Winter Aconites

There was a legend that this plant only grew in England where Roman soldiers had shed blood. In some rural areas they are known as 'choir boys' because of the ruff around their necks. This attractive plant is an archyophyte originating in the deciduous woodlands of southern Europe from Italy to Bulgaria. There are few sites in Wiltshire but one I know of is by Vernditch Chase, just on the county boundary with Dorset where there is a patch of beech woodland which is smothered in golden blossoms in late January. It is nowhere near habitation but may well have been on the site of an abandoned cottage garden although no trace of this now. They have flowered here in great profusion for many years. The first record in this country is from a garden in 1596 but did not escape into the wild until 1838. Since then it has become established sporadically in shady sites and seem to have a predilection for churchyards. It will thrive even under the dense shade of horse chestnut and sycamore.

The name is confusing. They are not in any way related to *Aconitum*, or Monk's hood. The

**... known as 'choir boys' because of the ruff around their necks ...**

**... thrive even under the dense shade of horse chestnut and sycamore ...**

**Photos by Barbara**

Linnaean name, *Eranthus* means spring flowering, while their specific name, *hymenalis* means winter flowering. Which ever, it remains one of the earliest flowers. They go through the cycle of flowering, seeding, and nurturing tubers while the leaves are present all early in the season. The advantage to the plant to flower this early is that while growing beneath a woodland canopy they can catch whatever sunlight there is before the canopy of leaves develops to shade them out. Any pollinating insects such as bumblebees may be sure to notice these bright blossoms and their leaves can manufacture food

in this brief opportunity. They are tuberous perennials with leaves that die back soon after flowering. They spread by seed but mainly by propagation from tubers. Seeds are formed but these have only a short viability. Pods are produced among the dying foliage when they turn black. The best time to propagate them is by dividing the tubers while the leaves are still present.

I have discovered nothing of the pharmacology except, like all members of the Ranunculaceae, it is poisonous.

*Barbara Last*





# Savernake Ponds Revisited

A chance meeting with a friend in Marlborough during the penultimate week of March 2010 led Richard and myself to do a quick revisit to the old ponds in Savernake Forest. The WBS had a summer excursion to the ponds in 2006 led by Jack Oliver and Joan Davies. This was a great day out: lots of pond dipping but not for amphibians in the ponds but for water plants and some exploring of the forest.

Some time later after the excursion Richard and I returned to have another look and found most of the ponds we visited with everyone had been given a spring clean albeit in a rather robust manner. The ponds were in need of attention otherwise they would have been lost. They had been cleaned: much vegetation removed and the surrounding ground thoroughly disturbed by heavy machinery. We were a bit saddened by what we saw.

We needn't have worried!

An overcast and calm morning with rain forecast for midday in late March found us back at the column to have a walk and to revisit some of the ponds. On either side of the track by the column are two ponds, column north (SU228648) and

column south (SU228647). The north one has been enlarged and cleared of debris and quite full of water but one tree remains in the water and there was some floating vegetation. This included some common duckweed (*Lemna*). A large common toad (*Bufo bufo*) was skulking in the shallower water. The other pond here has not been disturbed, it barely looks like a pond and so there was little to see.

The Leigh Hill ponds (SU221644, SU219645) close to main road have also been cleaned, these are smaller ponds, full of water but nothing to see. We set off through the forest heading towards three ponds to the north. There was not much stirring in the forest: a few blue tits and great tits calling with the ground vegetation and trees looking asleep: no tree buds. Nothing was growing under foot and there was a great covering of dead leaves mainly oak and even though it was overcast it was quite light.

Pottery pond (SU219650) was not looked at but we went over to Bitham pond (SU221651) which was well watered. As we looked we thought bubbles were rising so went round to look. The bubbles didn't come from decaying vegetation in the water but from frogs and as we stared we realised the water was full of frogs (*Rana temporaria*), scores of them. They were having an "away day" and softly croaking all enjoying

**We were a bit saddened by what we saw**

**We needn't have worried!**

**A large common toad (Bufo bufo) was skulking in the shallower water**

themselves. I have never ever seen anything like this before.

After some time we moved on through the forest to find Thornhill pond (SU217666) near the nurseries. Here the paths were becoming very indistinct and hard to follow and the area much more isolated. The only colour apart from shades of brown was the bright green of some clumps of moss (*Polytrichum commune* we think). The oaks looked very elderly and dropping their branches and had wonderful shapes, nearby were remains of sweet chestnut with their twisted trunks. They seemed even older than the oaks with little left after the shedding of their branches. Rain seemed close so we hurried as best we could and finally got to Thornhill as the rain started. Again we looked and Richard shouted, yes, the pond was full of frogs, hundreds of them all playing and splashing in the water, what a sight and just a little spawn on the surface.

We left them in peace but did wonder what had happened to the "water soldiers" (*Stratiotes aloides*) which Jack had found in the pond in 2006 and which we had the pleasure of seeing. Maybe another visit in due course.....

*Judy Gosnell: March 2010.*



# The Wiltshire Invasive Plant Project (WIPP)

Don't these plants look lovely?

The Wiltshire Invasive Plant Project is in its second year and will be starting its surveying and removal programme again very soon. Although plants, like the above Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) can look pretty in flower they are of real concern to British species, such as the Water Vole (*Arvicola terrestris*). They do not only grow rapidly and spread quickly along waterways preventing our native species from growing, but they also cause soil erosion when they die back during winter, leaving the underneath soil bare and susceptible to being washed away into nearby waterways.



The WIPP programme will be focusing on surveying and removing invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) along the Hampshire Avon, Bybrook and River Ray. However, we will be gathering records from all across Wiltshire and within Swindon Borough. If you would like to be part of this vital river management, whether putting posters up in your area, or coming along to a task, we would love to hear from you.

If you would like to take part in this project, contact Emma Harrington (Wiltshire Invasive Plant Project Officer) at [emmah@wiltshirewildlife.org](mailto:emmah@wiltshirewildlife.org). She will send further details as soon as they are available.

If you find any of these plants, the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC) has an invasive plants recording form at <http://www.wsbrc.org.uk/YourRecords/CurrentSurveys/invasiveplants/recordingform/Survey.aspx>

## 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:

Tim Kaye  
35 Marshall Street, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 0ED  
Telephone: 07980 863 577  
Email: [timdankaye@hotmail.com](mailto:timdankaye@hotmail.com)

### Subscriptions:

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

## Everyone an Author

The informal and – we hope – cheerful record of our outings in the Newsletter is a corporate effort. The different styles of the reports are an important ingredient of the delight of the whole.

At some meetings, it can be difficult to find anyone to write a report. The result was that last summer, towards the end of the season, we had some of the stalwarts writing more than their fair share.

We wonder whether people hang back from contributing by lack of botanical knowledge – all that Latin! (don't worry about this, the editor always checks or adds the botanical names). We know, and appreciate, that some people come out with us in order to be in a lovely place, proceeding at a gentle pace with some nice plants to look at, or as a companion to another person or some other non-botanical primary reason. The impressions of our doings from such people are just as valuable in the Newsletter as a hard-nosed list of rarities with painstakingly identified up-to-date Latin names.

A report does not need to be long. It can be handwritten. Do send photos too, but our noble editor will provide illustrations if need be. If you need help with plant names when writing up, any member of the committee who was there would be delighted to help.

This summer the programme is exceptionally extensive and juicy.

Please help. Just one report each. Be canny; volunteer on a day when you reckon the trip will be less specialised, or shorter.



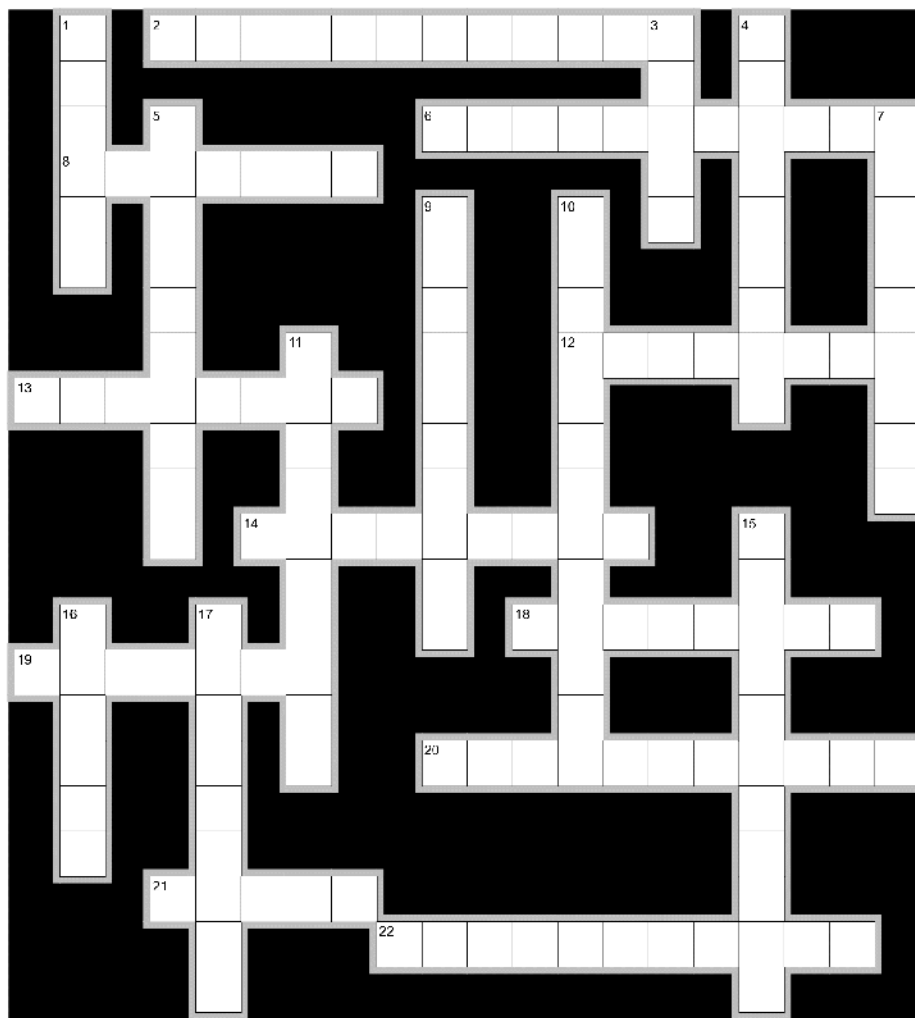
# Calculous Crossword

## Across

2. Common Restharrow
6. Women lie down on this for an easy birth
8. Bovine fall
12. Derived from a Latin itch
13. Small umbellifer seen on the Devon holiday
14. Purgative Linum
18. AKA 'Witches thimbles' or 'Fairy Bells'
19. A toadflax born out of wedlock
20. Glaucous sedge
21. A very common moss, Pseudoscleropodium .....
22. Better than iceberg lettuce

## Down

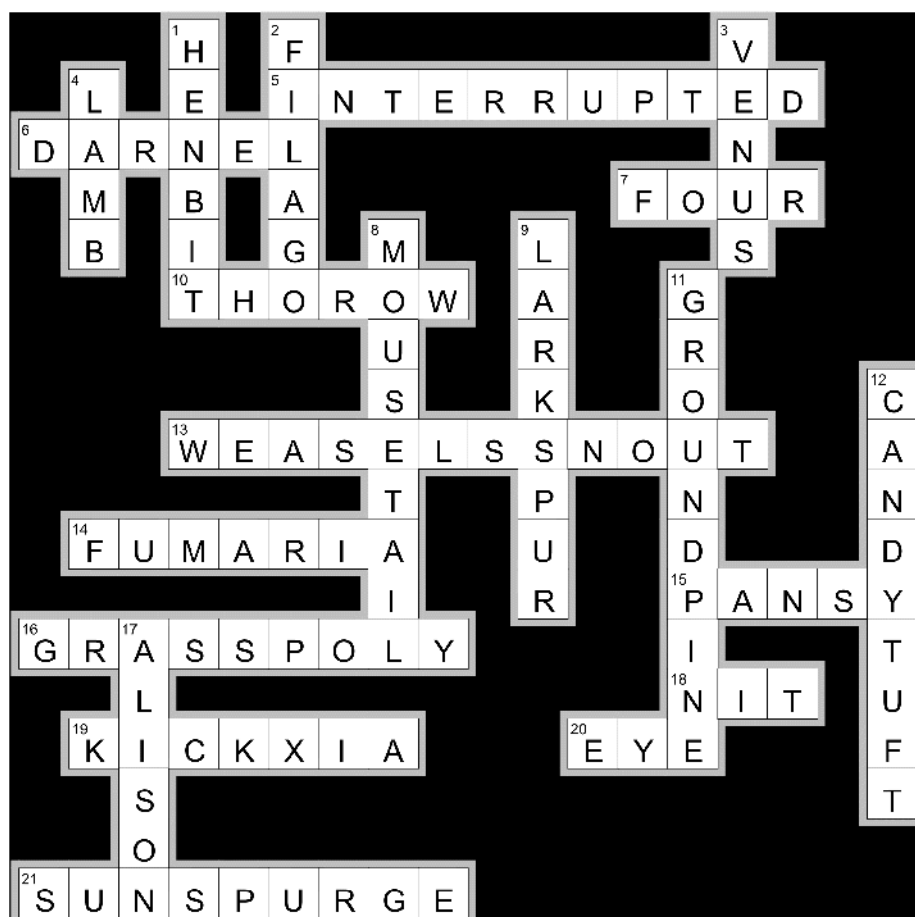
1. Common, thin-leaved grass
3. Monkey Orchid - Orchis .....
4. Ophrys apifera
5. Extensively mapped at Martin Down
7. Moss to remind you of snails, Ctenidium.....
9. A compound herb
10. Thistle with little to no stem
11. Quaking Grass
15. Cheesy Dianthus
16. Flowers during easter
17. Latin for 'Little bell'



EclipseCrossword.com

# Arable Crossword - solution -

(Newsletter 34)



EclipseCrossword.com

# Wiltshire Botanical Society Committee

Richard Aisbitt	Chairman, newsletter, records	01793 694680	richard@theaisbitts.co.uk
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Tim Kaye	Treasurer and Membership	07980 863 577	timdankaye@hotmail.com
Pat Woodruffe	Meetings Secretary	01794 884436	pmw.bentley@waitrose.com

## Summer Meetings

Tuesday 11 May 2010	Harnham Water Meadows, Salisbury, Sue Fitzpatrick et al.
Saturday 22 May 2010	Chafford Gorges / Gray's Chalk Quarry, Essex, Ken Adams
Sunday 23 May 2010	Fobbing Marshes, Essex, Ken Adams
Wednesday 26 May 2010	Calstone and Cherhill Downs Richard Aisbitt and Joy Newton
Saturday 29 May 2010	Chaddington, Richard and Judy Gosnell
Sunday 06 June 2010	Morgan's Hill, Sharon Pilkington
June 12 - 16	Yorkshire Dales
Friday 25 June 2010	Jones's Mill, Pewsey, Jane Brown and Paul Darby
Saturday 03 July 2010	Wadswick Common, near Box Lyn Adams and Pat Woodruffe
Tuesday 13 July 2010	Home Farm, Cholderton, Anne Appleyard and Eileen Rollo
Sunday 18 July 2010	Crook Peak, Weston Super Mare, Sharon Pilkington
Friday 23 July 2010	Calstone and Cherhill Downs, Richard Aisbitt and Joy Newton
Sunday 01 August 2010	Coate Water and other Swindon sites, Tim Kaye
Sunday 15 August 2010	Cooper's Meadow, Marlborough Jack Oliver and Joy Newton
Sunday 15 August 2010	Savernake Forest, Joy Newton
Sunday 12 Sept 2010	New Forest, Sharon Pilkington
Sunday 19 Sept 2010	Looking at Moths, Barbara Last
Sunday 17 Oct 2010	Picket Clanger Woods, Malcolm Storey and John Presland

For details, see our meetings leaflet or the Wiltshire Botanical Society web site at <http://www.wiltsbotsoc.co.uk>

You can download this newsletter (and other recent newsletters) **in colour** from <http://www.southwilts.com/site/WBS/Newsletters.htm>

## Future meetings

Please suggest ideas for meetings or talks. Perhaps more training workshops? If so, what would you like to learn about? Contact Pat Woodruffe by writing to:

Anchorsholme, Hop Gardens  
Whiteparish, Nr. Salisbury  
Wilts SP5 2ST

or by phone or e-mail (01794 884436, [pmw.bentley@waitrose.com](mailto:pmw.bentley@waitrose.com))

## Editors Corner

Thank you to all the people who have sent in items for this newsletter. The unexpected extras like Barbara, Judy and Tim's contributions are especially welcome.

There's an appeal on page 14 that highlights our difficulty in finding people to write reports of meetings, so it's a welcome surprise for me to receive two reports for the same meeting. This happened for Lesley Balfe's lichen identification session at Urchfont Manor. The two reports were so different that, rather than combining them, I have printed both in full. Thanks to Sonia and John for providing these.

Tim Kaye has produced another crossword for us, this time on calcicolous (lime-loving) plants. I am struggling for the answers and hope that other members will have more success. He has also sent the solution for the previous crossword on wild plants of agricultural land.

Please send any items for the summer newsletter (issue 36) by 19 September 2010. Post to Richard Aisbitt, 84 Goddard Avenue, Swindon, Wilts SN1 4HT, or email to [richard@theaisbitts.co.uk](mailto:richard@theaisbitts.co.uk)

## Other News

Our Botanical Recorder, Sharon Pilkington, writes an annual report about plant life in Wiltshire for the WSBRC. You can find her 2009 report at: <http://www.wsbrc.org.uk/YourRecords/CountyRecorder/plantandfern/2009report/PageTemplate.aspx>