

# WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY



The stunning display at  
WWT Distillery Farm  
Photographs © Martin Buckland

# EDITOR'S FIRST PAGE



## Autumn 2026

There is no need for me to tell you what a terrible hot summer we have had or how little botanising has been carried out. Apart from field meetings I have barely been out purposely looking for plants on my own.

The work on The Wiltshire Flora 2000 – 2025 continues apace; it has all been written, with just polishing up to be done and the inclusion of a few more photographs where space allows. The copy will then be ready to go to the printers before the end of December. This allows enough time for it to be printed so we can distribute books at our AGM on Saturday March 13<sup>th</sup> 2027.

When we originally proposed writing a new Flora, we asked the opinions of those attending the AGM in 2024 what their preference was, a book or online publication. You overwhelmingly voted for a physical book. Back in the summer I asked you to let me know if you expected to purchase a copy from the Society and I have to say that the response was disappointingly low with only 14 requests. The official pre-publication flyer offer is still to be sent to all but if you do have an intention to buy then please let me know asap. Your response will allow us to advise the printer how many copies of the book to produce. You may email me at [martinbuckland8@gmail.com](mailto:martinbuckland8@gmail.com) or you can write to at WBS, 40 Middle Ground, Royal Wootton Bassett, SN4 8LJ.

Our field meeting write-ups have suffered for this newsletter with few, or no notes taken and so much of this edition is taken up with a library of photographs only. If attending a field meeting, please feel free to offer your services to do a write-up, it would help the committee and myself enormously.

Secretary needed: Many of us on the WBS committee are also working on the new Wiltshire Flora project and that is keeping us very busy. We are also having to cover for the vacant secretary's post and although the work is not lengthy or massively time consuming we would rather it was kept as a separate role. Is this something you could take on for us ? (see below)

- To organise and attend all committee and AGM meetings. (Committee is just 2 or 3 times a year.)
- Prepare the Agenda for meetings (Send out to committee pre-meeting for any items needing to be discussed, format and finalise.)
- Take and publish minutes.
- Keep an electronic archive of minutes (also shared with one or two other committee members.)
- Keep a record of committee members and re-election dates.
- Hold a copy of the WBS Constitution, WBS GDPR statement and Meetings Risk Assessment and bring to the attention of the committee when ready to review (next 2027).
- Send any relevant information about the Society to its membership.
- On occasion, must be able to travel to a venue for meetings, typically Devizes, Melksham or elsewhere.
- Be able to use Teams or Zoom for online meetings.

Would you like to join our committee anyway? We are still only eight members, and we urgently require some new blood to help us run the Society, please volunteer.

## Hall Farm, Thickwood

May 17th 2026

Leaders: Lara Spearman & Haydn Jenkins

A good-sized group of 20 botanists with widely varying ID skills (mine at the beginners end of the scale!) attended this meeting, which despite the forecast of inclement weather turned out to be a lovely day. We were kindly hosted by Lara and Haydn, the latest generation to manage this organic farm.

Hall Farm is a 260-acre organic farm in the Cotswold National Landscape that is situated at the end of the Cotswold Escarpment. It has a range of habitats, from shallow lowland calcareous grassland and woodland to fertile river meadows that is managed with a herd of Aberdeen Angus and some Red Devon cattle.

The grassland comprises a mixture of arable reversion from the 2000's and very steep pasture that is unlikely to have ever been ploughed. The exact historical management is not clear, but in the 1980s the farm was arable apart from the steepest slopes, then put into set-aside, and then managed organically with cattle and sheep. The farm has received no inputs for around 35 years.

130 acres of the farm are designated as a priority habitat: species-rich lowland calcareous grassland, which hosts a range of orchids including Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*, Greater Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. However, on our visit we only managed to find one orchid which wasn't mature enough to identify correctly.

The hoped-for Bistort *Persicaria bistorta* had probably been grazed off by the thriving population of beavers, which had also made a meal of the Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, but there were a myriad other plants for us to see, including Wild Mignonette, *Reseda lutea*, Hoary Ragwort *Senecio erucifolius*, Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis* (its name suggesting a more acidic environment yet growing here on limestone) and Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*.

As usual, the more experienced botanists were generous with sharing their knowledge with the less experienced among us and as always, I returned from the meeting quite exhilarated and full of enthusiasm for increasing my own botanical knowledge and sharing it with others.

Lara and Haydn plan to continue to enhance the quality of the species-rich grassland with grazing and haymaking and without inputs and we look forward to returning in the Autumn for a further meeting.

Fran Brooks



Botanists spreading out over the slope looking for treasures © F.Brooks

**Cley Hill NT**  
**June 13th 2026**  
**Leader: Kat Newbert**

There was a surprising number of good chalk grassland species on the flat land at the base of the hill, and we found plenty to enjoy on the climb up, but neither of our target species, Early Gentian *Gentianella amarella* subsp. *anglica* and Bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum*, was in evidence. Cattle were grazing the top of the hill and may have topped the Gentians that grid reference records suggested would be there. However, we saw a pleasing number of Pyramidal and Bee Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and *Ophrys apifera* and enjoyed scouring the northern, lower areas of the hill that had much Milkwort and many butterflies (including Adonis Blue) and moths nectaring on the Thyme *Thymus drucei* on anthills.



Top left: Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*; above: Musk Thistle *Carduus nutans*; left: Wild Thyme *Thymus drucei* on anthill. All photographs © Fran Sinclair.

## Distillery Meadows WWT

June 27th 2026

Leader: Nick Self

The meadows were just breathtaking: a haze of mauve/blue of Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* as far as the eye could see, accented with the purple of Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*; many of the former in differing shades including white. Nick Self, WWT's Reserve Manager, led us and was looking quietly satisfied as we oohed and aahed at the floral display. There was a great deal of Pepper-saxifrage *Silene silaus* as well, a good indicator of ancient meadows. For those able to compare we agreed that the best of the meadows here rivalled even that of WWT's Clattinger Farm SSSI. Even in the field being grazed with cattle there were good species including Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, and in a dry ditch we found Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*.



Above: Four shades of Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*; below left: white flowered (normal blue in background) of Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*; below right: sitting in the meadow; all © Martin Buckland. Below left: Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* © Fran Sinclair.



## Wareham Common and Slepe Heath

July 5th 2026

Leaders: Tom Smith and Trevor Warrick

This field meeting was held jointly with the Dorset Flora Group. As soon as the Wiltshire contingent saw the treat that was the River Piddle, they became rather ill-disciplined, but beside and within the river we all saw some lovely plants. The highlights were a section of meadow full of Whorled Caraway *Trocdaris verticillata* and a patch of Marsh Cinquefoil *Comarum palustre* still in flower. The afternoon session at Slepe Heath, in fairly punishing heat, failed on all the hoped for plants, but within a few steps of the cars we found Lesser Centaury *Centaureum pulchellum* and Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa*, so there was no real disappointment possible, especially for those who delighted in the Mangalitza pigs wallowing in a muddy area, near which Dave found a tiny Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*.



Above left: Marsh Cinquefoil *Comarum palustre*; above right: Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa*; below left: Dodder *Cuscuta epithymum* at Slepe Heath; below right: Unbranched Bur-reed *Sparganium emersum* at Wareham; all photographs © Fran Sinclair



## Landford Bog WWT

July 18th 2026

Leader: Caroline Longley

Similar plants to Slepe Heath (see 5<sup>th</sup> July 2026) were on view to members including Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*. Both Round-leaved and Intermediate Sundews *Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. intermedia* were seen here along with plenty of Bog Pimpernel *Lysimachia tenella*. Marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor* and Star Sedge *Carex echinata* was also recorded.

Below left: Intermediate Sundew *Drosera intermedia* © Anne Appleyard; Below right: Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor* © Fran Sinclair



## Stonehenge NT Reversion fields

July 26th 2026

Leader: Keith Stegall

Those attending this meeting were unsure as to whether any plants would have survived the heatwaves and lack of rain, but they need not have worried. As well as very interesting information from Keith, the National Trust's south Wiltshire Lead Ranger about the timing of reversion for each of the areas we walked through (and could see from the top of a Bronze Age round barrow) there were plenty of lovely chalk grassland species, including Dwarf Sedge *Carex humilis*, and Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata* in three colour versions, pale blue, dark blue and white. Many species had 'gone over' but we had fun trying to identify them from tiny leaves as we sat among the picnic thistles (Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule*) for lunch. In the last reversion field we walked through, with perhaps more rank vegetation, there was a fairly large, scattered population of Hawkweed Oxtongue *Picris hieracioides*, which extended onto the verges of the A303 over the fence.



Above left: A 'normal' blue Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata*; above right: white version of the same species. Both photographs © Fran Sinclair

## **Somerford Common**

**August 8th 2026**

**Leader: Nick Self**





Previous page: Somerford Common looking rather worse for wear. This page, above left: Kat in a near desert; above right: Intrepid botanists desperate to find something in the dirt and dust. © All photographs Nick Self.



Above left: Wood Small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos* is widespread in areas on the eastern side of Somerford Common; above right: A plucky Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica* defies the dry weather. Photographs © Fran Sinclair

## Southleigh Woods

September 5th 2026

Leader: Kat Newbert

A couple of things surprised us as we entered the wood and that was just how green everything was and how damp it felt, surely not just because of the recent rains and a contrast to the disastrous summer. Just inside the gate we found Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*, Square-stalked St John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum* and Water-pepper *Persicaria hydropiper*, the latter very common on the pathways throughout the wood.

A plethora of fescue-like grasses at the edge of the track made us do a double-take realising they were in fact a raft of Remote Sedge *Carex remota* and were easily found as we walked along. A different looking nettle caught one person's eye; it had narrower leaves than 'normal' with long tapering tips. This turned out to be a sub-species of the Common Nettle *Urtica dioica* subsp. *subinermis* the so-called Stingless Nettle – and yes, I tried, it was stingless.

Overall, few plants were in flower but there was the odd sighting of Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* and despite the hundreds of Bog Stitchwort *Stellaria alsine* I think we only found a couple of flowers in total on the day.

A common plant found at the edges of the forest coupes was Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant* with some showing two forms of leaves. But a not so common species found growing in the tracks where it was lightly shaded and moist was Common Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis tetrahit* a plant I normally associate as an arable species. In this area too there were fresh little bunches of leaves that had probably benefited from the recent rains, and these were Common Purslane *Lythrum portula*. A single, Green-ribbed Sedge *Carex binervis* was spotted by Carex-guru Kat but for the majority of us we just had to accept that identification as the hoped-for helpful seed head had already dispersed.

I'm sure many of us walk past (ignore?) Willowherbs so when Short-fruited Willowherb *Epilobium obscurum* was called out I realised I had been walking by many plants; sadly, they were not in flower. Another near walk-by was a Gorse (well it's just gorse, isn't it?) but David was right to call it out as it was clearly different and following a proper look it was in fact Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*.



What was disappointing was the vast areas of Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum*.(left) It was beyond belief that this wasn't being controlled. It's disappointing enough that conifers have been planted in what once was an ancient woodland site but the two together are growing to the detriment of what was clearly a more heathland habitat as was indicated by the clinging on of a few patches of heather *Calluna vulgaris*.

The timber trees were the usual suspects such as Western Red Cedar *Thuja plicata*, Western Hemlock *Tsuga heterophylla* and Douglas Fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii* but it was strange to come across specimens of Coastal Redwood *Sequoia sempervirens*. Even stranger were the two compartments of Tulip-tree *Liriodendron tulipifera*, is this a trial species for future timber or pulp? A brilliant spot by Fran was the find of the day and members were called back to see a small sapling of Monkey-puzzle tree *Araucaria araucana*; this just before a stand of the trees. [They were grown on the whim of the Marquess of Bath at the time, see [www.hiddenwiltshire.com/post/robin-hood-s-bower](http://www.hiddenwiltshire.com/post/robin-hood-s-bower)]

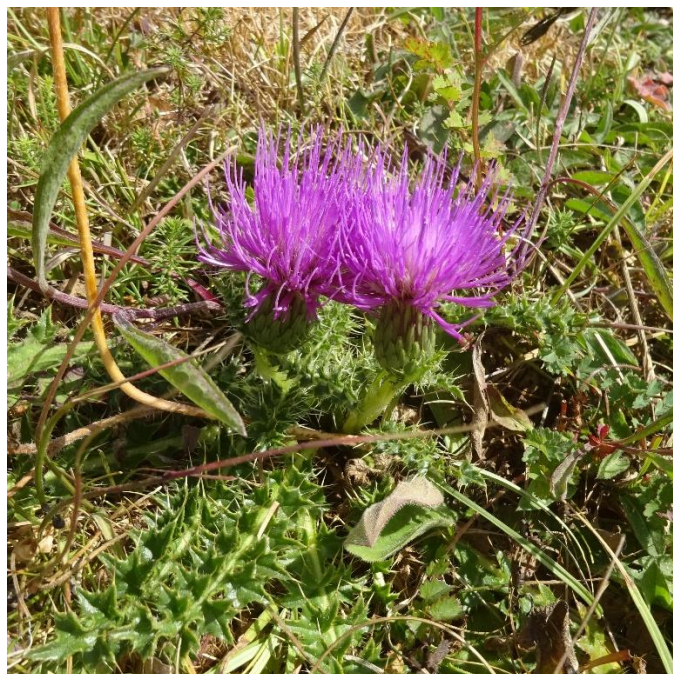
Our thanks go to Kat for passing on her knowledge on a very pleasant day in the company of friendly like-minded souls.

Martin Buckland



Above left: Heather *Calluna vulgaris*; above right: Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant*; Right: Monkey-puzzle *Araucaria araucana* sapling. Below: Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*. All photographs © Martin Buckland





Above left: Woolly Thistle *Cirsium eriophorum*; Above right: Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule* both taken within the Stonehenge landscape; below left: At a Stonehenge reversion field, we can only guess what Sharon, Richard and Keith Steggall are discussing; Below right: At Somerford Common, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* with attending Green-veined White Butterfly *Pieris napi*. All photographs © Fran Sinclair.



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