



Special Covid Edition No. 4

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Dave and Martin's Grand Day Out

"Coming out for a square-bashing session?" he says; what an idea!.

"Dave, it's November and (normal) people don't go botanising in November!"

"Yeah! Come on, square ST9726 has only got fifty-something records in it and you can just 'roll down' the hill from Devizes to Rowde."

I'd not been having a good week and I could do with some fresh air and if nothing else I could prove that you don't go out in late autumn. Okay I know we partake in the New Year Plant Hunt but that's just fresh new year madness and then you go back to sleep. The more I thought about it, the more I could see us as Wallace & Gromit on their 'Grand Day Out' with our outlook as bleak as the moon landscape.

So, we meet up. It's blinking cold, very damp, and foggy. I have my thermals on for the first time this season, complete with hat and gloves and we're botanising. "Gromit", I said to myself, "this is going to be bad".

Off Dave goes (there's no stopping him). "*Poa annua*", I shout.

"Yep", he calls having already crossed off that and twelve other names. Up the ante Martin. "Oh Dave, look out for Common Whitlow-grass", I'd seen a couple of teeny ones near home. Two seconds later Wallace shouts "Tick".

Bl**dy hell Martin must try harder. Ahh, I thought, time for some soul-searching for Dave, or would that be soul-saving? I take him through to the churchyard, but I'm dashed within minutes.

"Look, Bulbous Buttercup", says Dave. I think I miss this buttercup's vegetation quite a lot but at this time of year they seem to rise slightly from the turf to show off their leaf form as if readying themselves for next spring and similarly we found fresh growth of Cuckooflower too; perhaps I can find things then. Dave then spots some *Clavaria* fungus, black stems like mini croziers and further on we find an assortment of waxcaps, yellow to burnt orange and even a verdegris one. I manage to spot some more *Clavaria*, this time like golden fingers. Okay Dave, this is not such a daft idea after all.

We wander through the built-up area, country lane, grass fields, sticking to the footpaths, like we always do, (was that a lightning strike?) gradually ticking things off.



"Mr Ordnance Survey says there are two ponds over there Dave". Using the fog as cover, er um, we followed desire lines (honest) in the field, but we get up close to find them both dry and only gaining Crack-willow and Aspen for our efforts. Moving on to a stream we were slightly disappointed not to find more but Dave picks out *Carex strigosa* Thin-stalked Woodsedge just a metre in front of me. Like a smaller but more relaxed Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula*; how did I not see that?

"There's Alder there" Dave, I point to two 10m tall trees that he had

missed. Of course I wasn't trying to point score ... just desperate.

On our way back to the cars through housing we pick up a few garden escapes and I attempt to show off my horticultural knowledge. "Oh look Dave, there's *Viburnum farreri*. Reminds me of my apprenticeship days; it's flowers have a lovely smell".

"Oh yes, I know that one, but not its scientific name". Phew! A score for me and garden plants.

Back in the centre of the village we pick up a few bits on the brick walls like Wall-rue and Ivy-leaved Toadflax but then I suggested that instead of returning back to the cars that we take just a little detour as I'd seen some weeds along a road earlier. (Remember this bit, it was MY idea).

Immediately Dave and I walk into the car park frontage of a local pub and Dave shouts "Hey, what have we here?" Hmmm? A fumitory it was clear but even I knew that it was something different. I offered Western Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria occidentalis* as the flowers were quite pale, but Dave pointed out that the sepals were the wrong shape. "My guess is, that its Common Ramping-fumitory *F. muralis* subsp. *boraei*", he said, "but I'm not really convinced".



Martin's Ramping-fumitory *F. Reuteri*, photo: Dave Green

Fortunately, there were enough flowers and a few fruits for a voucher specimen to be taken. Dave takes this home and rapidly keys it out. "It was actually quite easy", he tells me; "the racemes exceed the peduncles in length; the sepals are almost entire and 3.5-4.0mm long. The corolla is only just 11mm but that was probably down to the plant flowering at a sub-optimum time of year. The stigma has an apiculate tip. I know what this is, but I'll just check it out with a botanist mate of mine". (Who just so happens to be Tim Rich, BSBI referee for Fumaria).

Along with these emojis this was his friend's reply.

"Looks very good to me"



So what was it, you ask? Martin's Ramping-fumitory *F. reuteri*. A first for Wiltshire.

Oh, and how many different species did we see on the day? (Only) 192 in just under three hours.

The moral of the story? If Dave's says go botanising in November, December, January you jolly well take notice...oh and listen to me as I can point you to all the right places.

Martin Buckland, with huge thanks to Dave Green

Get to know your committee

There are currently eleven members on the Committee that run the Society but what do you know about them? Here is a Q&A for **Martin Buckland**: Field Meeting planner; member of the WBS Project Group.

Who influenced you most growing up? My primary school teacher Mr Whittaker took us on nature rambles that definitely had an impression on me. In secondary school, Mr Edgar Smith and Mr Mike Russell founded the school's bird club; an interest that is still with me today and not least my father, Mr Frederick Buckland, a very keen gardener.



Who do you admire now? David Attenborough, and an organisation called Wild Justice.

What did you do in your working life? The most enjoyable part of my working life was running Swindon Borough Council's plant nursery, responsible for producing bedding plants, ornamental pot plants, trees, and shrubs for the Borough. I finished up there as Parks & Amenities Officer for Horticulture; with a job specification too large to print here before taking early retirement in 2012.

Why Botany? I have always liked growing plants so you'd think wild flowers would have come naturally to me however I never took up a serious interest in 'Council weeds' until the late 2000's.

What is your best find? I'd like to quote two plants for slightly different reasons. Both were new to me and found in 2015. One was Buttonweed *Cotula coronopifolia*, that I located in a small drying out pond. What I didn't know at the time was that I had discovered a species new to Wiltshire! The other was a couple of small trees in a hedgerow that I must have passed every day of my working life. The difference this time was that I was on foot recording for the Atlas. This was Almond Willow *Salix triandra* and only 200m as the crow flies from my house!!

Do you have a favourite garden flower? *Agapanthus*, I used to have a collection of 51 varieties.

What books are you reading now? I have two on the go, David Attenborough's, 'A Life on our Planet' and Bernard Cornwell's 'War Lord'.

Name one thing people may not know about you. For the last twenty plus years I have kept a small colony of Field Cow-wheat *Melampyrum arvense* alive in a tub in my garden. At the outset there were only five sites existing in Great Britain, one of which was in a private garden in VC7. The owner was concerned about the potential future loss of this colony and allowed me to 'pinch' some seeds. Thankfully, due to the great work by the Species Recovery Trust this plant has been made safer with expansion and management.

Aside from Botany, what are your other interests? Visiting Gardens and gardening myself. Books...I love to buy books.

Any last words? I hope the new Government farm subsidies genuinely support wildlife and those persons that persecute raptors are brought to book.

How should we record in the future?

Response to Pat Woodruffe's article, Newsletter 50b November 2020

Further to Pat's comments I would like to add my support for her suggestions. There is nothing so frustrating when looking up a record to realise that just a centroid grid reference has been used for a site when clearly that site covers more than an individual 1km square. There is a large, protected site in the north of the county that covers four 1km. Squares, yet many of the records for that site are given only for a central point; this provides less than ideal data.

Site descriptions for a 1km square can also be confusing. When writing up the records after a day out one looks for the best description off the Ordnance Survey map. Example: I record a 1km. square where the only name available within in it is 'Martin's Copse'. The copse is small taking up less than 20% of the whole and the records gained covered both the copse and all the land surrounding it. I write up the records as SU1234 Martin's Copse. When a third party then looks up records just for Martin's Copse itself, what do they get? This is the real problem Pat has for any search at the periphery of Bentley Wood.

Further, I believe we've got it wrong for the BSBI Atlas. Every square that was recorded should have been described by just its moniker e.g. SU1234. Any additional qualifier should then only be added if it referred to a specific site only i.e. 'SU1234' and 'SU1234 Martin's Copse' or, perhaps, 'Martin's Copse Without'. Instead, I feel to some extent that we have perpetuated similar problems as at Bentley Wood.

It is my understanding that many ecologists already use Living Record or I-Record, or one of their own in-house GIS mapping systems to record different criteria on a hand-held tablet. These are expensive of course and I'm not sure WBS would need to go down that route or volunteers supporting their use however I do think a couple of ways to improve records for future use is, say what you mean, even if that requires breaking a 1km square, into different sites within it and if you feel a plant is worth recording then don't just use what seems as the standard 6-fig grid but use a minimum of 8 figures.

Martin Buckland

News from Essex

Ken Adams is BSBI Recorder for Essex. He is also a member of WBS and has visited and recorded in Wiltshire, researching our native Black Poplars. He has welcomed and guided our society members on a visit to Essex sites.

He publishes the colourful and informative "Essex Botany", which frequently includes Ken's pictorial keys to various plant groups. The magazine can be sent to anyone for the price of postage, £5 for five issues. Also, Ken has offered to send me a batch of back copies to distribute among members.

He has responded to Sharon's 'Botanising against the odds' in WBS newsletter 50b:

- White Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria capreolata* (a first for Wilts) is also spreading in Essex: theirs is subsp. *babbingtonii*.
- Fern-grass *Catapodium rigidum* subsp. *majus* (another first for Wilts) is going bananas in Essex. First spotted in 2005.
- Greek Dock *Rumex cristatus*, spreading into Wiltshire, is established in every hectad in VC18 (south Essex).

Are plants marching westwards from Essex?

Contacts

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Do you have any news or comments? I would be pleased to publish these in the next issue. Maybe you would like to write a full-blown article.

By email: richard@theaisbitts.co.uk. By post: Richard Aisbitt, 84 Goddard Avenue, Swindon, SN1 4HT



Stowlangtoft Manor

Residential visit to Suffolk

May 15 – 18th 2021

I promised the committee that I would update everyone about this spring holiday early in the new year. Last year 15 members signed up and I booked sufficient residential accommodation on the Stowlangtoft Estate. Two other members wished to join us for the field meetings but to stay independently.

Our balance, of almost £3000, was due in mid-April, at the time of the first lockdown, and we were offered and accepted a deferred booking until 2021. The deposit of approx. £1000 paid in 2020 is non-refundable. The accommodation currently booked is for a large Manor House with nine bedrooms, all ensuite, plus a second cottage with three bedrooms and two bathrooms. The latter is about half a mile away from the main building.

Since the start of this current lockdown I have been in touch both with the owner of the properties and also those who wished to participate last year. Of the fifteen members, three wish to withdraw which suggests that we will require two fewer bedrooms. Clearly, there may be others who would like to join in this year but, understandably, such decisions are very hard to make at present.

There are other cottages grouped with the one that we have hired in a redevelopment known as the stable courtyard. At this stage, it would be possible to change our booking by removing the large manor house and hiring instead two other cottages. There are several pros and cons to this idea:

- We would not have a large kitchen to share meals etc. but three smaller ones.
- We would not have ensembles but several cottages have equal numbers of beds to bathrooms.
- We would all be within the same complex, not half a mile distant.
- Social distancing would be easier.
- It could work out a little cheaper and might be easier to ‘shed’ a property if numbers drop further.
- Although we would probably need to eat in several smaller groups, there would be sufficient space to allow groups to meet and chat after dinner.

Our balance is not due until mid April and much can happen between now and then, not least the vaccination programme. Once paid, the whole account is non-refundable other than by private insurance. Currently though, we do have the chance to change our accommodation and this might not be the case for that much longer. I don’t know how families view making bookings at present. Holidays abroad are pretty much off the agenda, so there could be pressure on accommodation in this country. It could also be prudent to bring our outstanding balance down so that, in the event of cancellation (by individuals or the whole holiday) the commitment is not so great. Clearly those involved must bear the brunt of this and the society should not be out of pocket.

As always, I would welcome the thoughts of everyone, whether or not a participant, and especially anyone who might be thinking of joining the group. As things stand, I need to reduce the accommodation and the sooner I do this the better so that the owners have a good chance to re-let it. Life cannot be easy for them either!

All best wishes, Pat

Wiltshire Botanical Society Project Group.

Recording for BSBI Atlas 2020 has now ended and the society is looking for new projects for the coming years. In August the WBS committee heard a proposal for a new stand-alone group to oversee this process.

Committee members were asked to look at a number of suggestions for these projects and to add some of their own. During a zoom meeting in September we confirmed that this new group would be formed and would be known as the Project Group. It was to have maximum of six permanent members, plus a number of interested members of the society coming on board to take forward and be part of specific projects. It was also decided that the core of this membership should not be drawn wholly from the committee and that other members of the society should be approached. The following committee members were invited: Dave Green and Martin Buckland as permanent members and Pat Woodruffe in an ad hoc roll to look at policy and proposals. Both Richard Aisbitt and Sharon Pilkington agreed to have an input when needed.

Three new members, Katherine (Kat) Newbert, Jenny Bennett and Stephen Beal, have been approached and have agreed to join the group.

This short note is to invite other members of the society to offer their expertise and for at least one to become a permanent member.

The following project proposals are presently being discussed:

- 1) **Continuation of square bashing** of those squares either not recorded or under recorded, with a view to the data going forward to form part of a new Flora of Wiltshire
- 2) **Rare plant update.** This can go hand-in-hand with the recording above. We have a long botanical history and many records of rare plants in the county, many of which have not been re-found or seen in the last 20 years. Those interested in locating and focusing on specific habitats and species can be given historic lists and grid references to, hopefully, go off and re-find the target species.
- 3) **SSSI and County Wildlife Sites.** Large numbers of these sites have not been surveyed in recent years. We feel that many of the WBS members have in-depth knowledge of local sites and we really would like to ask you, especially with the CWS, for your local input. In many cases there has been change of ownership and lack of ongoing management. If you know a site, you can help us in many ways. You may wish to survey it yourself. If not if you could get us an invitation or at least a name of the present owners. There are many more sites available than we will be able to cover but, in this first year of 2021, it would be nice to have a feel from our members as to the sites that they know and the possibility of Wilts Botanical Society members visiting and surveying some of them.

Dave Green

Bird Seed Plants

As a follow-on to the article 'Cover, Game and Forage Crops' (Newsletter no.49 2020) I thought I would investigate what might be likely to appear in our gardens from seed put out for wild birds.

We have all encountered garden refuse dumped in the countryside and to the surprise of finding an herbaceous perennial or ornamental shrub in the middle of nowhere. I have certainly found the odd sunflower or millet plant so what else might be expected if that rubbish were to contain the sweepings from the bottom of a bird cage? Just what ingredients are added to the wild bird and caged bird seed mixes?

One cannot go into a garden centre, pet shop, hardware store or supermarket without finding at least a few items of bird food. Like my search for cover crops etc. I searched mostly online and was surprised just how many companies sell seed for wild birds, caged birds, ducks and geese, poultry, and pigeons and doves.

An article found online and often quoted is 'Bird seed aliens in Britain' by Hanson and Mason 1985. This piece discusses not only the different plants whose seed is imported into Britain but the alien seeds they found within samples they examined. (Hanson has since written Birdseed Aliens originating from Niger wild bird food, 2019). The authors quote that they found around 30 different plants whose seed is used for domestic and cage birds such as chickens, pigeons, parrots, budgerigars, and canaries. My search of over twenty companies however discovered some

Canary Grass *Phalaris canariensis* - Martin



15 regularly used items and a further 35 or more added to mixtures. This increase can almost certainly be put down to the rise of popularity in feeding wild birds. I suggest that at the time of Hanson and Mason article, this popularity was just beginning to rise and since then many more seed types, herb seeds and fruits have been added. Black sunflower seed that now appears ubiquitous as a food only appeared in 1991 whilst Niger used in mixtures at earlier date only became popular as a single food in 1998.

The list below gives the most typical seed found in wild bird mixes. A longer list of plants from caged bird seed is included as an extra to the newsletter. Hanson and Mason quote Gold of Pleasure *Camelina sativus* but I only found this listed for 'Cover, Game and

Forage Crops'. In addition they reference Cumin, Caraway and French Teasel (Fuller's Teasel) *Dipsacus sativus*, but I found no modern reference to these. They mention Aniseed, but I only found this used as a treatment oil on pigeon food.

How many of these plant seeds will be viable I cannot answer. Seed goes through many processes to clean and separate out impurities and alien seeds and some may go through a further process to remove them of their husk or shell.

Typical wild bird seed and fruit found in UK

Common Name	Scientific Name
Black Sunflower-----	<i>Helianthus annuus</i>
Buckwheat-----	<i>Fagopyrum esculentum</i>
Canary seed-----	<i>Phalaris canariensis</i>
Linseed-----	<i>Linum usitatissimum</i>
Maize-----	<i>Zea mays</i>
Monkey Nuts-----	<i>Arachis hypogaea</i>
Niger-----	<i>Guizotia abyssinica</i>
Oat-----	<i>Avena sativa</i>
Peanuts-----	<i>Arachis hypogaea</i>
Rape-----	<i>Brassica napus</i> ssp. <i>oleifera</i>
Red Dari-----	<i>Sorghum bicolor</i>

Linseed/Flax *Linum usitatissimum* - Martin



Common Name	Scientific Name
Red Millet -----	<i>Panicum miliaceum</i> (form of Common Millet)
Rowan-----	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Safflower-----	<i>Carthamus tinctorius</i>
Striped Sunflower-----	<i>Helianthus annuus</i>
Wheat-----	<i>Triticum aestivum</i>
White Millet-----	<i>Panicum miliaceum</i> (form of Common Millet)
Yellow Millet-----	<i>Panicum miliaceum</i> (form of Common Millet)

References: Stace, C A, New Flora of the British Isles 4th edition.
Royal Horticultural Society: Plant Finder.

The main purpose of Hanson and Mason's paper was to discover what Alien plant seeds were imported with the cropped seed. In 1985 they quoted that they had found a staggering 438 different species. Since then Hanson, 2000, has provided an update and in addition in 2019 Hanson published bird seed aliens originating from Niger and I refer you to the following references for more information.

References: Hanson, C G & Mason, J L 1985. Bird seed aliens in Britain. *Watsonia* 15:237-252.
Hanson, C G 2019. Birdseed aliens originating from Niger (*Guizotia abyssinica*) wild bird food. *British & Irish Botany* 1 (4): 292-308.
Hanson, C G 2000. Update on bird seed aliens (1985-1998). *Watsonia* 23:213-215.

Martin Buckland

Cover picture: flowers of Martin's Ramping-fumitory *F. Reuteri*, photo: Dave Green