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Website: http://www.wiltsbotsoc.co.uk
The Snowdrop Walk at Erlestoke Woods

We were fortunate to have good weather and a relatively late season for this walk. Despite some mild weather, the snowdrops were at their best and a lovely sight.

Sonia began by telling us something of the history of the village and the manor house:

Erlestoke is one of a string of spring-line villages which grew up near springs issuing from the base of the Chalk escarpment. It had a medieval manor house which was demolished and a new house built in 1791. The park was landscaped and six lakes created which meant that the old village aligned north-south was demolished and rebuilt on an east-west alignment. There was also a carriage ride around the estate with two bridges across the holloway on what it now the B road. In 1880 the church was demolished, like the old houses it spoilt the view of the park from the house. A new church was built near the park gates, so parishioners did not now have to go across the park. The old churchyard is still in place. There was a serious fire to Erlestoke house in the 1950s and it was partially demolished. It is now part of the prison.

The walk was entirely on soils formed from the underlying Upper Greensand Formation, which forms a fringe at the foot of the chalk downs escarpment throughout England. From Devizes south- and westwards the formation is more conspicuously developed, forming a platform or 'bench' at the foot of the downs. It gets ever more prominent towards Alfred’s Tower near Stourhead Gardens. At the base of the tower the Upper Greensand reaches 260 metres above sea level so it exceeds the local Chalk escarpment at White Sheet Hill nearby (245m).

Wiltshire's highest point, Tan Hill, 295 metres, is on the Chalk.

The reason for the hill-forming nature of the greensand is its greater thickness in Wiltshire and the presence of sandstone (locally named the Shaftsbury Sandstone) and beds of chert. Chert is similar to flint, and geologists just use the term for pre chalk-aged 'flint'. The notable greenish tinge in the Upper Greensand is the presence of the mineral Glauconite. This mineral
contains compounds of Magnesium, Calcium, Potassium, Sodium, Iron and Silica which have been 'rotted' from the parent-mineral mica, in shallow anoxic seawater.

The walk made its way up a valley cut by its small stream into the Greensand plateau. The OS map shows no spring, so it must rise in the pond, Wellhead Pond, with its many Roach or Rudd fish, which we walked past just before leaving the woods for the open fields. In fact the OS map doesn’t show the stream either! After allegedly dryer than normal conditions, this caused some debate among the party. At the highest part of the walk, in the fields, the soil was clayey and lots of moss was growing. The clay is mapped within the Boyne Hollow Chert, lying on top of the Shaftesbury Sandstone. This was the high point of the walk for Sharon who spotted *Rhynchosporum megapolitanum* an uncommon moss. Her record proved to be only the fifth in VC8 and a new 10km square record.

The geological highlight came as we approached the walled garden, and consisted of a deep cutting where the Shaftesbury Sandstone could be seen in vertical cliffs. It was soft greenish sandstone with ellipsoidal 'doggers' of harder material. Erosion of the sandstone had revealed the extensive root growth of several old beech trees. We tend to think of beech as shallow rooted but these were well anchored into their substrate.

Our thanks to Sonia and to Rosemary for organising this splendid morning out and for the excellent pub lunch which many of us enjoyed afterwards. My thanks also to Sonia, Richard G, Becky and Sharon for their contributions to the report.

*Pat Woodruffe*
Saturday 17 March 2012

St Patrick's Day at Caen Hill Locks

This flight of 29 locks, on the edge of Devizes, raises the Kennet and Avon Canal 239 feet in just two miles. It is an amazing feat of engineering, designed by John Rennie, and takes boaters at least half a day to complete.

As part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, a 60-acre wood is being planted alongside, including disease-resistant elms.

March 17th found a group of botanists parked near the top of the flight, wondering what they would find at the beginning of the season. Not much in flower probably.

Having phoned lunch orders to the local pub, we set off.

Large hoary thistle rosettes had us wondering, but it was concluded they were probably Spear Thistle (Cirsium vulgare), despite their unusual appearance and abundance.

Further discussion followed over a fine display of tiny delicate white flowers with deeply notched petals, growing in profusion along the edge of a lock. These were Common Whitlowgrass (Erophila verna), this genus being called 'much misunderstood' in Stace 2010! They were found where shuffling feet would have caused disturbance.

The walk was a chance to catch up with friends, clear the cobwebs, and practice identification of leaves.

Both Water Figwort (Scrophularia auriculata) and a Comfrey species (Symphytum sp.) were identified from leaf and stem shape. Often a plant is identified by flower alone, and as a result many of the other interesting features are missed.

Flowers of Pond Sedge were appearing. Sweet violets (Viola odorata) were in flower adding a spot of colour.

Leaves of Spotted Medick (Medicago arabica) were found at the base of a hedge.

By the locks we saw rosettes of Hoary Plantain (Plantago media), leaves of Creeping Cinquefoil (Potentilla reptans), Garlic Mustard (Alliaria petiolata), Hedge Geranium (Geranium pyrenaicum), Ground Ivy (Glechoma hederacea) and an occasional large plant that challenged the group, who eventually agreed it was probably Wild Turnip (Brassica rapa ssp. campestris).

David told us about the geology of the site – a pit of Gault clay to the side of the path was probably the source of materials used to puddle the pounds and make the bricks for canal construction.

Bluebell leaves led to a discussion about natives, hybrids, and the Spanish Bluebell which has very wide leaves.

We walked back up the other side of the flight on the grass. Leaves of Common Vetch (Vicia sativa) and Hemlock Water-Dropwort (Oenanthe
Fritillary Survey, Clattinger Farm

There we were in the middle of a field on Clattinger Farm on a cold, wet April day with a metre-square aluminium quadrats counting *Fritillaria meleagris*. The day was organised by Emma Rothero and Mandy Dyson of the Open University’s Floodplain Meadows Project. We were there to monitor the success of this delightful, if doubtfully native, plant with its chequered hanging bells. The sampling points in the field were already marked out with bamboo canes in a 10 x 10 metre grid pattern. This year’s survey was to set a baseline and they aim follow the Fritillary’s success by surveying exactly the same positions in succeeding years. When I asked how they could possibly find these again, I was told they had a sophisticated GPS system that was accurate to a centimetre or so, and that they often found the hole that a bamboo cane had gone into the previous year.

The recording was pretty detailed, with quadrats divided by string into 100 squares. We had to count the plants and measure and count their leaves in each of these squares. With 100 plus stations, it was good that we had a big team and could head back to the warm in the Wildlife Trust’s education centre at Lower Moor Farm by lunchtime. Paul Darby, Jane Brown and I were the only WBS members there, but perhaps others will be tempted out in another year, especially if the sun shines.

*Richard Aisbitt*

crocata) were seen, and one fine solitary Oak.

There were birds too – Herring Gulls, Tufted Ducks, Coots, and a Mute Swan with last year's cygnets.

In the large watery pounds at the side of the locks, we noticed submerged plants – Stoneworts maybe.

We missed Sharon's expertise, but, feeling a bit cold, and the sky looking uncertain, we headed to Rowde for lunch, looking forward to food and Malcolm's talk.

*Jane Brown*
Saturday 28 April 2012

Clouts Wood, Quidhampton Wood and Bincknoll Castle
Leader: Richard Aisbitt

Just eight of us set out on a cold, wet and windy day, spotting Exmoor ponies sturdily munching Tor Grass Brachypodium pinnatum on Markham Banks. The ponies were to be joined by 100 plus Herdwick sheep and lambs in May, to be together responsible for turning the rough grazing back into species-rich downland on this new Wiltshire Wildlife Trust nature reserve. We took in the dead flower stalks of Common Gromwell Lithospermum officinale on the way, with its polished hard white seeds, but the wood was more comfortable on a day like this. We strolled slowly round, seeing Bluebells, Early and Common Dog Violets, Herb Paris and Goldilocks buttercup in flower and Bath Asparagus with foliage only. Meadow Saffron foliage was developing seed pods from last autumn’s flowers and Green Hellebore was developing its large seed pods from this winter’s flowers. We identified Bush Vetch from its obovate leaflets (wider towards the base) and Wood Vetch from its glossy green leaves and crown-spiked stipules. Another flowerless vetch defeated us, but Poland's vegetative key later made it Common Vetch with mucronate tipped* leaflets and arrow-headed stipules.

Only three of us stayed for the afternoon, making our way through the woods towards Bincknoll Castle. Scrambling and slithering down a magical steep woodland gully, we passed last year’s fronds of Hard Shield Fern and found a patch of Herb Paris at the bottom. The latter had been recorded previously in the SSSI part of the wood, but not here, so it was a nice find. A steep climb back up to the castle took us past plenty of primrose and cowslips. Large mounds of Wild Liquorice grow on the ramparts, but had not yet emerged in this cold spring. The descent brought us past lots of Nettle-leaved Bellflower plants beside the shaded track and the walk back through the wood produced just one plant of Stinking Hellebore.

Richard Aisbitt

*little spikes
Wild Liquorice

Michael Smith, the county micromoth recorder contacted me this spring to ask if Wild Liquorice Astragalus glycyphyllos was still growing on Bincknoll Castle. A micromoth similar to the pea moth, the Liquorice Piercer Grapholita pallifrontana feeds exclusively on Astragalus pods. Most of the colonies of Liquorice in Wiltshire have disappeared, but a return visit to Bincknoll in June revealed 46 large humps of the plant, flower buds just showing. Michael visited later and found a thriving colony of the moths.

Glycyphyllos means “sweet-leaved”. If you chew the leaves, you get an intensely sweet taste like saccharine. Cattle appear to leave the plants alone.

Richard Aisbitt
Monday 7 May 2012
Porton Down
Leaders: Stuart Corbett and Anne Appleyard

What a difference there was between the springs of 2011 and 2012. My vision, when I planned this meeting, was of a warm, sunny day with butterflies on the wing and loads of plants coming in to flower. The reality was quite different: cool, raining, no butterflies at all and the plants all at least a couple of weeks behind their flowering time of the previous year. The weather did, of course, improve as we were preparing to leave.

Despite this, a group of 23 met at the Conservation Room and we began with a short talk from the DSTL Conservation Officer, Stuart Corbett. Stuart described how the last two or three dry winters had taken their toll resulting in high grazing pressure from the very large population of rabbits and an associated decline in both the opportunity for plants to flower and the butterflies and other insects to obtain food. He told us about an amazingly quick change in the population size of two beetles: *Nebria brevicollis* and *N. salina* which are indistinguishable except that the former has hairy hind tarsi and the latter smooth ones. Painstaking observations on the part of Stuart have revealed that the fortunes of these two have reversed on the ranges in just a few years. *N. brevicollis* was by far the more common species but is now relatively rare whilst *N. salina* has increased immensely. Is this climate change in action?

Venturing onto the range, our first stop was a walk into Isle of Wight Wood to see the Lady Orchid (*Orchis purpurea*). On the way there were a few points of interest: Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*) in leaf and the white spikes of Birds’ Nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) pushing their way through the ground. No one is sure how the Lady Orchid ‘arrived’ at Porton but one spike was noted in 2002, far from her known relatives. We were very pleased to see that she is now surrounded by offspring and several sturdy buds were showing colour.

 Sadly, these good finds, as well as those below, all occur in Hampshire VC12.

We next went in the direction of The Old Lodge, once a shooting lodge but demolished some 80 years ago. Several garden plants live on however and we found Narcissi (*Narcissus poeticus*), Snowdrops (*Galanthus* sp), Leopard’s Bane (*Doronicum pardalianches*), Stinking Hellebores (*Helleborus foetidus*) and, some way from the site, Cypress Spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*). Dr David Allen, one of our party, took a specimen of the spurge which had a rust on it. He has since confirmed that it is *Uromyces scutellatus* in the uredial state. Also at this site was a large population of the rare Meadow Clary (*Salvia pratensis*). The prize for the ‘best find’ however went to the diminutive Slender Bedstraw (*Galium pumilum*), a small and insignificant plant which grows on the top of anthills. This plant was on the BSBI list of threatened plants that were sought out in 2011. Just one individual was found last year in the general area where we were, but not at the precise location, and several more were found on a different part of the range, in Wiltshire.

The rain had eased by the time we returned to the cars for lunch and most of us were able to sit outside and chat.
Others were ‘eyes down’ and as a result yet another good species was located. This was Dwarf Mouse-ear (*Cerastium pumilum*), a diminutive species that was growing in the gravel near to our cars and amongst it Sharon found a rare bryophyte, *Didymodon acutus*.

For our last hour on the site we first went amongst the juniper bushes, a census of which is being undertaken for the first time since 1970. Roughly 18,000 were counted then and now, after 2 winter’s work, we are approaching 8,000. The task should be completed during the winter of 2012 / 13 and it seems likely that the grand total, in both Hants and Wilts, could be around 10,000. The reason for the decline is essentially the lack of regeneration. Bushes that were considered old in 1970 are now dead or dying and no youngsters have developed to replace them. Numerous cuttings were taken a few years ago and there are several hundreds of young plants that will be planted out next autumn – at sites yet to be agreed.

Growing with the juniper are some very strange topiary yews. They are maintained very regularly by rabbits, and possibly by deer, so that although quite old and certainly supporting lichen growth, they stand only a few feet tall. One in particular has got away and at a height of a meter or so can now produce a tuft of more normal foliage.

The final point of interest for the day was some bushes of Small-leaved Sweetbriar (*Rosa agrestis*). Once again, this is a rare plant although possibly one that is overlooked. Like the more common Small-flowered Sweetbriar (*Rosa micrantha*) with which it grows, it is a glandular rose although, characteristically, it lacks glands on either the hips or the peduncles and does not give out the pleasant scent of apples. When in flower it can be spotted by the pale petal colour and, later in the year, the hips take on an unusual shape with an elongated neck. Earlier in the morning Sharon also spotted a plant that seemed to have characteristics of both of these species and might have been a very rare hybrid. It is hoped to arrange a visit to the site for the BSBI rose referee in August, so that these finds can be verified beyond doubt.

Our thanks go to Stuart Corbett for providing so many gems of information and for giving up a day’s gardening to join us, as well as to Anne Appleyard for organising the visit and to VC recorders Sharon Pilkington and Tony Mundell. Next time we shall spend the day in Wiltshire and see what can be found there!

*Pat Woodruffe*
Friday 18 May

Stonehill Wood

Leader: Paul Darby

Ten of us assembled in this privately-owned wood, renowned as the home of a colony of 30-40 Bechstein’s bats. The wood is on Oxford clay, with some wet areas increasing its diversity. Even as Paul was introducing the site, we could admire bitter vetch, *Lathyrus linifolius*. He led us to two large patches of early purple orchids, *Orchis mascula*, of about 35 flowers each, with nearby Twayblade, *Neottia ovata*, and greater butterfly orchid, *Platanthera chlorantha*. Notable trees that we visited included small-leaved lime, *Tilia cordata*, and wild service *Sorbus torminalis*. After lunch by the pond, where there were some very convenient seats, we explored this new habitat (trying not to tread on the orchids) and then ventured into the wetter woodland areas to search for ferns, finding a good variety – lady (*Athyrium filix-femina*), hard (*Blechnum spicant*), soft shield (*Polystichum setiferum*), broad buckler (*Dryopteris dilatata*) and scaly male (*D. affinis*). All these notables, and the other abundant ancient woodland indicator species such as pignut *Conopodium majus*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, testified to the high quality of this woodland. The yellow archangel flowered alongside bugle *Ajuga reptans* making a colour combination much appreciated by us – and also evidently by the foraging bumblebees, many of which were the recently –arrived tree bumblebee which has a ginger thorax.

Overall, Sharon recorded 164 species (excluding bryophytes) – a splendid total for the day, so many thanks to Paul for arranging and leading our visit to this lovely site: we are especially indebted to Paul for his fortitude in view of his indisposition at the time. It was thoroughly enjoyable day for us, and we trust we did not disturb the bats’ slumbers!

*Sue Fitzpatrick*
**Saturday 26 May 2012**  
**Cheverell Down**

Leaders: Rosemary Duckett and Nigel Cope

On a gloriously sunny day we met at the top of Peartree Hill to walk across to Cheverell Down. We started with 14, were 18 by lunchtime and still met new arrivals as some of us left.

We first walked across the field that last year had thousands of Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*). This year there were none, but there were plenty of other treats to come and we had lovely views across the valleys on this part of the Plain. We were lucky to have Nigel Cope with us who has known the area very well over a long period. He led us into a small wooded area where there were huge numbers of White Helleborines (*Cephalanthera damasonium*) in peak condition. When we reached Cheverell Down we first saw a starry carpet of Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*) and then a mass of Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*) and Chalk Milkwort (*Polygala calcarea*), studded with Lesser Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*) and Burnt Orchid (*Neotinea ustulata*). Later, after negotiating a barbed wire fence we saw Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*). The Sainfoin (*Onobrychis vicifolia*) was just coming into flower. There were numerous other goodies.

The butterflies also were spectacular despite the wind and we saw Green Hairstreak, Adonis, Small Blue, Marsh Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy and Small Heath.

It was so hot that most of us hunkered down in shade to eat lunch but were soon drawn out to look again at the lovely views and the mass of chalkland plants and butterflies.

*Sonia Heywood*

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**The Brecklands Trip, Norfolk**  
**17 - 20 June**

Anne Appleyard arranged another meticulously planned few days, with most of the two dozen residents based in farm buildings near Dereham. Foxley Wood, a large ancient woodland SSSI, was just up the road.

We split our time between the mix of heathy, woody, wet and dry areas of the Brecks and the coastal areas around Cromer. Bob Ellis, the BSBI Recorder for East Norfolk, and Richard Carter, the Recorder for West Norfolk, gave us a terrific welcome, guiding us on our visits and showing us the specialities. Frances Schumann and Carol and Bill Hawkins also gave us their company and local knowledge. Read on.

Next year’s planned trip to Dorset will allow members a choice of a few days away, or making day trips from home.
Sunday 17 June 2012
Cranwich Camp

The day began with a spectacular find in the car park – as usual! *Petrorhagia prolifera* (Proliferous Pink), one of Norfolk’s rarest plants, displays only one or two flowers at a time, but is prolific with seeds. Richard Carter, one of the Norfolk recorders, led us to other car park finds including our chalk land familiar *Koeleria cristata*, but here shining even brighter and taller.

Four nice Trifoliums were found:

- Upright Clover *T. strictum*
- Rough Clover *T. scabrum*
- Hare's-foot Clover *T. arvense*
- Hop Trefoil *T. campestre*

The soil in this Breckland area varies by the metre and can similarly vary in pH, hence the large variety of plants. Other finds included Sand Sedge *Carex arenaria*, happy here some way from the sea, lovely Purple-stem Cat's-tail *Phleum phleoides*, Hairy Tare *Vicia hirsuta* with its downy pods which became well-known on this trip.

The final car park find was Common Broomrape *Orobanche minor*, which hadn’t been recorded here in 20 years of visits.

The Nature Reserve itself was spectacular and had been extended by 20 hectares; it is a good example of a grassy Breckland heath on chalky soil. We were serenaded by Blackcaps, Skylarks, Woodlarks and Yellowhammers and there was much to see including Hairy Rock-cress *Arabis hirsuta*, Field Mouse-ear *Cerastium arvense* with its nice white stars everywhere, and the rare Tower Mustard *Arabis glabra*. Other rarities were Purple Milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus* found in Wiltshire on Silk Hill, and Spanish Catchfly *Silene oitites* with its wonderfully sticky stalks.

Before driving off for lunch we visited the nearby Cranwich Heath to be shown the rare Smooth Rupturewort *Hernia glabra*; this was soon invisible within its circle of cameras.

*David Pickering*
Summer 2012
Wiltshire Botanical Society
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Sunday 17th June 2012
Santon Downham

If we had arrived at this car park 10 years ago we would probably have had trouble parking for it was in this area that the last, or so it was believed at that time, pair of Red-Backed Shrikes bred in the Country, and could be viewed from the car park itself. Dave Green in divine genuflection prostrated himself on the grassy edge. Good man I thought praying for more Shrikes. “Tillaea” he announces. Tilia? That small? Oh Crassula tillaea, Mossy Stonecrop. (Martin, Dave’s a plant man not a bird man. Concentrate, you’re trying to learn about plants, forget birds).

Whilst kneeling, the diminutive Birds-foot (ah birds are involved!), Ornithopus perpusillus was also found and what a fantastic looking plant it was when viewed under a hand lens. Also found here was the pink flowered Sand Spurrey, Spergularia rubra and a tiny Buck’s-horn Plantain, Plantago coronopus.

As we walked along a track parallel to the railway line we were advised to keep an eye out for the local form of Wild Pansy, Viola tricolor spp. curtisii. Whilst I expected it to be found in open habitat I was pleased but surprised when a single plant was found ‘buried’ amongst long grass.

Within the flattened track Small Cudweed, Filago minima was quite frequent and here Dave went down again (I need to supple up) and found Shepherd’s Cress, Teesdalia nudicaulis that had all but gone over. It was also here that Perennial Knawel, Scleranthus perennis, was found; “it can be told from the annual Knawel for it has a broad white halos on its sepals” (Yes I know it’s rare, and yes I can see the halo, and thank you for showing me yet another new plant but there’s a Woodlark singing from atop that tree stump now do I look up or down?).

We retraced our steps and crossed the road to Santon Warren. At the barrier two interests were found, Spring Beauty, Claytonia perfoliata and Smiths Pepperwort, Lepidium heterophyllum. Our target plant though was found a kilometre further on where a linear stretch of land is managed for Tower Mustard, Arabis glabra. Not the most stunning of plants but a delight to see nonetheless. The locals were walking by with their dogs seemingly unaware of what was on their doorstep.

We were all rather warm by now so a brief walk into the shade of some Beech trees was very welcome but then so were the numerous but not yet flowering Broad leafed Helleborines, Epipactis helleborine, and a few Green flowered Helleborines, Epipactis phyllanthes whence a conversation of their leaf orientation took place, broads in a spiral up the stem, greens opposite but in the same plane up the stem. A Yellow Bird’s Nest, Monotropa hypopitys was found, (ahh birds again you see) making two holidays running.

A long walk back to the car park finished with a debate whether the Bloody Crane’s-bill, Geranium sanguineum was genuine or a throw out. Whichever it was it was the end of a very good day.

Martin Buckland
Monday, 18 June 2012
Thompson Common

On Monday, 18th of June 2012 we visited The Norfolk Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve, Thompson Common. It is famous for its Pongos – more than 300 shallow pools formed 10,000 years ago and is one of the best examples of this type of periglacial landscape in Britain. Also famous for Water Beetles, Dragonflies and the selection of water plants it supports. It is 140 hectares of Fen, Scrub and Woodland. So quite a management headache helped by ponies sheep and cattle. Bob Ellis, East Norfolk County recorder, Carol and Bill took us round. As we waited to start, a Blackcap sang in the Car Park. The path from the car park was a dark green tunnel and the light at the end of the tunnel a bright yellow “Chicken of the Woods” fungi *Laetiporus sulphureus*. We found our first Pingo. Very atmospheric, it was easy to imagine a Dinosaur emerging. Instead we found Great Yellow-cress, *Rorippa amphibia* – for being the biggest cress it has the smallest fruits. Behind the yellow of the cress a stand of the pale attractive flowers of Water Violet, *Hottonia palustris*, Orange Foxtail, *Alopecurus aequalis* with Saffron like anthers, Tufted Sedge, *Carex elata*. Strangely, the emergent leaves of Harebell, *Campanula rotundifolia*, Tubular Water Dropwort, *Oenanthe fistulosa*, Common Spike-rush, *Eleocharis palustris*. Large, pale and striking Cyperus Sedge, *Carex pseudocyperus* at its best. Flat Sedge, *Blysmus compressus*. We wandered from Pingo to Pingo, now Bottle Sedge, *Carex rostrata*, which I seem to have noted as having inflated utricles. Bog Bean, *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Marsh Horsetail, *Equisetum*...
Potentilla bakerii. Sated with so many species and distractions from the flora by the fauna we left the wonderful Pingos. (For those of you with children and grandchildren they will be disappointed to learn that we saw no little black and white birds speaking gibberish!)

Marjorie Waters

Monday 18 June

Wretham Heath

Wretham Heath was acquired by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust in 1938 and was the first nature reserve in Breckland. We arrived to eat our lunch having escaped the biting insects of out morning visit, many of us ate our sandwiches in the cars, not because of midges but because it was cold and damp. However from then on the weather improved. As usual there was botanising in the car park where there was Amsinckia micrantha (Common Fiddleneck). We were again joined by Bob Ellis and two other local botanists and really benefited from their knowledge of plants and of the locality.

The reserve has three meres two of which have fluctuating water levels as they are fed by rising ground water. Both of them, Langmere and Ringmere, were dry. The third mere, Fenmere had water and has a lot of sedge and reed. As we entered the reserve there were sheets of Rumex acetosella (Sheep’s Sorrel), which made the ground red. There as well as the open heath there was an area of Scots Pine which was planted at the time of the Battle of Waterloo. The area was requisitioned for military use in WW2 and became part of the East Wretham airfield the decaying runways are another interesting habitat. We were very lucky to have several expert birders with us who helped identify a Stone Curlew early on in the reserve. We had a superb variety of plants including many that are seldom, or never seen in Wiltshire.

Sonia Heywood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plants we saw included</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alopecurus aequalis (Orange Foxtail)</td>
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<td>Carex divulsa (Grey Sedge)</td>
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<td>Carex muricata (Prickly Sedge)</td>
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<td>Cerastium semidecandrum (Little Mouse-ear)</td>
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<td>Clinopodium acinos (Basil Thyme)</td>
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<td>Gallium parisienne (Wall Bedstraw)</td>
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<td>Thymus pulegioides (Large Thyme)</td>
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<td>Myosotis ramosissima (Early Forget-me-not)</td>
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<td>Ranunculus sceleratus (Celery-leaved Buttercup)</td>
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Tuesday 19th June.
Sheringham and Beeston Regis Commons SSSI

Our final day in the field in Norfolk started bright and sunny as we assembled in the lay-by next to the Nature Reserve which is situated between the built up areas of Sheringham and Beeston Regis. We were joined by Bob Ellis – the County Recorder for Norfolk and Frances Schumann from the Norfolk Flora Group. This SSSI site was a surprise and delight and contained a rich mosaic species for us to note and enjoy.

The reserve is cited, as it is an ‘area of acidic heathland containing areas of species-rich calcareous spring fen on sloping ground within 1 km of the coast. Mixed mire vegetation has developed in seepage zones due to the juxtaposition of both acidic and calcareous plant communities’. The site has calcareous mire communities, wet acidic heathland, dry heathland and carr environments and also supports numerous amphibian and bird communities. The site is classified as a Norfolk Valley Fen.

Bob explained that the area is maintained by the Beeston Common Management Group which is a volunteer organisation involved with the restoration and conservation of the area.

We entered through the gate and came into a calcareous fen area which was dominated by the Common Reed (Phragmites australis). Here we also saw Tawny Sedge (Carex hostiana), Flea sedge (C. pulicaris), Common Fleabane (Pulicaria dysenterica) - not in flower, Bog Bean (Menyanthes trifoliata), and Marsh Valerian (Valeriana dioica). Few-flowered Spike-rush (Eleocharis quinqueflora) was also identified with Heath Wood-rush (Luzula multiflora) and Arrow Grass. Some leaves of Marsh Helleborine (Epipactis palustris) were seen. The path way had numerous hybridised variants of the Southern Marsh Orchid (Dactylorhiza hybrids) provided much interest and discussion. We were attracted to an unusually large variety of Yellow Rattle (Rhinanthus minor), some 450 mm tall, and were also surprised to see Quaking grass (Briza media), growing larger than we usually see it and not minding wet feet. Further into the reserve on some rising ground, there was a great display of foxgloves (Digitalis purpurea).

We then moved onto a more acidic area and enjoyed seeing some fruiting sphagnum moss, looking like cherries and bananas at X10. Here our attention was held by the large number of flowering Butterwort Plants (Pinguicula vulgaris) with Tormentil (Potentilla erecta) on the shrubby banks. We also saw a nice display of Marsh Fern (Thelypteris palustris).

Bob then lead us into the central mire where a calcareous pond had developed which yielded Fen Pondweed (Potamogeton coloratus). In this area was Blunt-flowered Rush (Juncus subnodulosus) and more Epipactis palustris rosettes. The area had been invaded...
somewhat by Goldenrod, a garden escape. There were plenty of baby frogs hopping around in the fen and we spotted a Marsh Fritillary on a Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*). Some Narrow Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) was also found in this area. One of the highlights here, on raised mounds were a large numbers of rosettes of Sundews, both *Drosera longifolia* and *D. rotundifolia* were seen, each growing in its own unique micro environment, with Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*) nearby.

On some drier ground in this area we saw Heath Groundsel (*Senecio sylvaticus*), a first for many of us and close by, but back on wetter ground was two clumps of Crested

Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris cristata*).

Our walk then took us onto much drier ground where Changing-Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*) was growing over the path and some Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*). There may be native Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*) here and Bob was going to return to the site later on in the year to check on these. A final highlight for all was a splendid Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*)

We all found this a delightful site, with much interest and complexity. Some of the party enjoyed their lunch at the picnic site near the pond, whilst others looked for some shade.

There is more information about this site at www.beestoncommon.org.uk

Alison Robinson
**Tuesday June 19th, pm.**

**Overstrand Cliffs.**

Bob Ellis

This was our sixth and last session of botanising in Norfolk with all of us together.

The main interests of the afternoon were less for individual species and more for topography, geology and, as it turned out, archaeology.

The soft cliffs are subsiding gently on to the beach, the sands then to be washed away. The layers of the cliff – very obvious where there had been a recent fall – are relatively new, Pleistocene sediments of calcareous sand with occasional rafts of chalk. The slumps and slides of the cliff, from a little distance, looked like gigantic quantities of cake mix that have plopped off the cliff, one dollop falling against another. The barest, newest patches had Coltsfoot as a primary coloniser but quite big pieces of cliff had slid down with their surfaces intact forming slanting scraps of meadow. These were without many, or any, seaside species and, if one ignored the sea so close, one could have been on any ungrazed calcareous meadow of quite ordinary things – Kidney Vetch, Bird’s-foot Trefoil, Yorkshire Fog, Black Medick, Red Clover, Yarrow. There were a few orchids, the most dramatic being a hybrid, *D. praetermissa* x *fuchsii* called, Bob said, *Dactylorhiza* x *grandis*.

Groins, some of them zigzag, had been built down the beach which presumably slowed the speed of erosion a little. However, the system being so unstable, there were few maritime species. We saw Sea Rocket *Cakile maritima*, Buck’s-horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus* and Sea Sandwort *Honckenya peploides*.

Our party became straggly - walking on the soft sand was hard going. Bob and Dave raced on to find Yarrow Broomrape *Orobanche purpurea*. Others pottered along, speculating on the redness of some of the seepages at the bottom of the cliff and their red/orange deposits; some relaxed against the cliff, staring out to sea and the huge offshore wind farm; some picked up pretty pebbles. Martin found
a fine piece of a belemnite but Sonia spotted the top prize – a Neolithic flint scraper. It had all the right knapping marks, though rather worn, and comfortably fitted the palm of right-handed person. Sonia also found a large piece of waste flint which would have been knapped off a raw flint-stone in one of the preliminary blows to shape a scraper or an axe.

We called it a day quite early and sat about on the cliff top, some with ice creams, unwilling to separate as it was our final time all together.

We said good-bye to Bob Ellis who had given us such a splendid two days of most un-Wiltshire habitats, just what we had come to see

Rosemary Duckett

28th June 2012
Ramsbury Water Meadows

We were fortunate, in this dismal summer, to have a dry morning for this meeting. The gardens of Newton Lodge provided an excellent starting place, as there were several acres of grassland, managed by mowing to different heights and leading to a small stream. The closely cropped lawn failed to excite but the 30cm sward had an abundance of orchids, Ragged Robin Silene (Lychnis) flos-cuculi, rushes Juncus spp., Creeping Jenny Lysimachia nummularia and Meadow-sweet Filipendula ulmaria. The orchids were mainly marsh orchids and their hybrids (Dactylorhiza praetermissa and D x grandis). One particular spike of the hybrid was unusual in the length of the bracts – see photo. The longest sward was dominated by grasses such as Yorkshire Fog, Holcus lanatus, False Oat Grass Arrhenatherum elatius, Timothy Phleum pratense and Red Fescue Festuca rubra together with Marsh Thistle Cirsium palustre and further Meadowsweet Filipendula ulmaria.

Next we moved over the road into the water meadows where the undulating nature of the terrain showed the remnants of the old system. The River Kennet provided a source of water for the carrier that still had the rusting sluices in place. The water flowed into drowners, small channels in the tops of the ridges, and from there drained down and was collected and returned to the river. The idea was to keep a continuous sheet of water flowing over the meadows during the winter. This kept the soil temperature a little higher and also supplied nutrients, so promoting an early crop of grass. There was a surprising
Round-fruit ed Rush - Pat

ow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor* growing in the ditches of the system – a plant that I would more readily associate with drier ground – together with Lesser Pond Sedge *Carex acutiformis* in the wetter parts, Meadow Fescue *Festuca pratensis* (now *Schedonorus pratensis*) and other relatively common species.

One good find was a few plants of *Juncus compressus* Round-fruit ed Rush growing somewhat precariously along the muddy path. It apparently ‘likes’ bare patches of ground, of which there were few in this under-grazed sward. It is the stem which is flattened and gives the plant its name, but the inflorescence also appeared somewhat two-dimensional. Dave also pointed out the hybrid between *Festuca pratensis* and *Lolium perenne* x *Festulolium loliaceum*. The main difference from *L. perenne* appeared to be the slightly stalked nature of the spikelets. Easily overlooked! See page 24 for Pat’s display of these three grasses.

Our other interest was the variety of Willows growing along the streamsides. We were able to find *Salix cinerea*, *S. viminalis* and *S. purpurea* and a range of hybrids. Once noted. There were a number of ways of identifying these species, the main one being the relative proportions of the leaves, but subtle differences in the colour of the bushes was also very helpful. *S. purpurea* supposedly has opposite leaves but the material that we examined proved not to have read the texts and had but opposite and alternate leaves on the same twig!

After a lunch along the river we took a final look at the surrounding area and discovered a large, very healthy oak tree. Its dimensions are yet to be calculated but it took five tree huggers to span its circumference and one to take the photograph.

Our many thanks to Dave, who travelled a long way to revisit these meadows which he first recorded in the early days of the Wiltshire Flora Mapping Project some 30 years ago.

*Pat Woodruffe*
Sunday, 8 July 2012
Park Bottom and Sherrington Down
Leader: Pat Woodruffe

10 members met up on an surprisingly dry day – for 2012, at least. Unfortunately though, this date offered alternative entertainment in the form of the men’s finals at Wimbledon, with Murray v Federer!

Therefore we were, perhaps, fortunate to be able to form three groups to record this lovely part of the Wylye Valley. The area provided a range of habitats including chalk grassland, scrub, arable field margins and a little woodland; the edge of Great Ridge Wood. From our parking spot we were able to venture in three directions and into four different 1 km squares so that, by mid-afternoon, some 750 records of 215 species had been amassed. There were many mature / senile Juniper bushes Juniperus communis in several areas, in particular along the track towards Stockton Down. Sadly, there were no young plants – a situation that is seen time and time again and accounts for the decline in the species. The area known as Park Bottom and its associated slopes of ‘access land’ provided an excellent range of chalk grassland plants including Clustered Bellflower Campanula glomerata, a good range of grasses and four species of orchid. In total over 140 species were recorded from this area that extended over two 1km squares.

The arable flora of some fields also proved to be quite rich. Cut-leaved Dead-nettle Lamium hybridum and Field Gromwell Lithospermum arvense were particularly good finds and a blue form of Scarlet Pimpernel Anagallis arvensis caused some excitement. Had it been the subspecies foemina it would have been a first county record but, sadly, the abundance of tiny hairs on the edges of the petals ruled this out.

One final plant of interest seen on the roadside as we approached the site was Cotton Thistle Onopordum acanthium, standing around 12 feet tall. If the ones that we saw earlier in the year at Caen Locks have grown to this height then they will be a magnificent sight.

Our thanks to the Fonthill Estate and to Mrs Wheatley-Hubbard for allowing us to record on their respective properties.

Pat Woodruffe
Thursday 19 July 2012

Sidbury Hill - a tale of two bird’s nests

Leaders: Rosemary Duckett and Jenny Amor

Sidbury Hill was looking good in the July sunshine as the group, which was a joint outing of about 3 km walk with the SPTA Botany group, set off to scramble over the north west slopes of the hill and explore the remainder with its iron age fort with the ramparts and beech wood.

Since 2003, soon after the hill was cleared of trees, the site has been monitored annually to watch the species increase, change and spread across the site. Over the years the site has changed with some species being dominant and then reducing to normal numbers and others slowly taking hold. The proposal is for occasional monitoring for the future.

The cleared area was supporting many grasses but splashes of colours were seen of purple knapweed, the yellow of Bird’s-foot-trefoil, blue of Small Scabious.

A bare area from the top to the bottom track had everyone searching for something as there seemed to be lots of chalk-loving plants. A message came that Frog Orchids (Dactylorhiza viridis) were at the bottom, some set off from top to bottom to investigate and photograph whilst some of us remained rooted to our top-viewing places not wishing to face the steep uphill climb and relied on the pleasure of those who ventured to see the orchids. After enjoying the slopes we moved on, walking round the ramparts and into the more wooded part. Here we were fortunate to see the Bird’s-nest Orchid (Neottia nidus-avis…nice that the Latin says what’s on the tin!) in the darkness of the beech trees amongst the beech leaves and well camouflaged it was too. In fact it was all over, many stems being seen.

Wandering on the next highlight was Yellow Bird's-nest (Monotropa hypopitys) growing out of the leaf litter: here it was in profusion with its curled stems growing in clusters with 250 having been counted recently. As the plant ages the stem straightens out so the fruit are visible. After seeing these delights, we had lunch and a slow wander around the hill in the sun looking at many of the commoner plants and back to the parking area.

Pausing on the summit, Richard unrolled a geological cross section of SPTA and we discussed the view across the plain’s flat surface which is controlled by the relatively hard Lewes and Seaford Chalk. The visibility was clear, and one could see across to Alfred’s Tower near Stourhead gardens.

Judy and Richard Gosnell.
Monday 6 August 2012
Oxford Botanic Gardens

The Oxford Botanic Garden is the oldest in the UK, having been established some 391 years ago. Dr Alison Foster, the senior curator, met us and explained that she had begun her career as a chemist, working in the pharmaceutical industry, and then developed an interest in horticulture – first training at OBG and now responsible for collections of plants and for developing links with University Departments both at Oxford and elsewhere.

She led us to a series of beds where all of the plants had medicinal properties and applications – in cardiology, oncology and for diagnostic tests. We saw plants such as Rosy Periwinkle and Yew, extracts from which have well known anti-cancer properties and also heard other interesting stories. For example, both Hordeum (barley) and Arundo donax (Giant Reed) have been investigated for a potentially useful substance known as ‘grammine’. Chemists were able to synthesis this compound but found that its properties were different from that of the naturally-occurring substance. Even so, this work led to the production of lignocaine, commonly used as a local anaesthetic. Other plants, particularly members of the Fabaceae, have uses in the identification of blood groups, whilst Artemisia extracts are used to counter viral infections. Amazingly, models of chemical structure sometimes appeared in the beds alongside the plant from which they originated.

A group of cannabis plants caught the eye and Alison told us about the difficulties in obtaining a licence to grow the plants. Not all strains contain the psychoactive drug THC but a licence to grow hemp-producing plants costs £1000 whilst licences to grow those producing THC are £3000 annually. We learnt also that police are now trained to distinguish between plants grown from seed and those from cuttings. The latter are cultivated by ‘serious growers’ whilst the former may arise from bird seed.

Close-by we saw a collection of plants that, according to a catalogue dating from 1600s (pre-Linnaeus), were grown in the garden all those years ago. A research student has been compiling a series of plant profiles which will be available on the website and also available on smart phones through their QR codes.

Professor Hitchmough from Sheffield University, who has received acclaim for his work on the borders in the Olympic Park, has been involved in the development of the Merton Borders, a new planting designed to withstand dry conditions and also to be low maintenance. The seed used represents three geographical areas, North...
America, South Africa and Mediterranean and was sown in November 2011 after the top 7cm of soil was replaced with weed-free deep-quarried sand. The whole is covered with a mesh to provide a micro-environment and also to indicate soil moisture. Weeding can be problematic since good ID skills are needed so students and volunteers are provided with a crib sheet so that they can identify that which has been sown. After this initial year maintenance will be reduced to an autumn cut and rake off.

To better fulfil educational objectives a fruit and vegetable patch has been created. Children can see their food growing and three local charities benefit from the produce. We then admired the colourful herbaceous border, walked past a huge black pine tree under which Tolkien had his last picture taken and moved on to the glasshouses. In the Lily House a huge tank, built in 1851 and still functional, was home to the Amazon Water-lily *Victoria cruziana* the leaves of which can be over a metre in diameter.

Alison rounded of our tour by showing us a pandanas plant, the leaves of which are edged with very sharp spines. Crow are able to make tools from these leaves with which they pick insects out of holes in tree bark. The Department of Zoology at Oxford is researching this aspect of animal behaviour and requires not only a supply of leaves but also a supply of naive volunteers (undergraduates) to mimic the learning process!

It was stories such as these that kept us entranced throughout our 1.5 hour tour of the gardens. We found a wonderful blend of history and modern applications. It was a superb example of how a collection of plants can be made relevant, informative and stimulating. As a result several of us chose to spend longer in the gardens and revisit some of the plants we had seen during the morning.

Others went on to the Harcourt Arboretum and had a pleasant walk through reversion meadows and then down a ride in very recently planted woodland, then some older woodland surrounded by a really efficient anti-deer fence so the under-storey, brambles and bracken were so thick it was hard to see any way except upwards. Almost back at the car park, we came across what must have been the original arboretum for the grand house. Mostly exotic conifers of huge size as planted early 1800s. Wellingtonias, Black Pine etc and a well-landscaped walk/carriage ride of Rhododendrons and Azaleas, many of them also very old.

*Pat Woodruffe and Rosemary Duckett*
Saturday 25 August.
Cholderton Estate
Leader: Sue Fitzpatrick

We met at the Cholderton Farm Shop and shifted into a minimum number of cars to move on to park near Scotland Lodge, from where we walked to a stone-curlew plot near the top of Beacon Hill. On the way we walked through a Sainfoin-rich ley grassland and a chalk grassland field in restoration. The plot itself – cultivated annually but not sown – is to provide suitable nesting habitat for stone curlews and lapwings, and, almost incidentally, excellent habitat for arable weeds which were abundant at the time of our visit (safely after the birds had fledged!). First, we looked at two rarer fumitories *Fumaria parviflora* and *F. densiflora*, both species abundant throughout the plot and intermixed so comparison was easy. In one part of the plot red hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia* formed a beautiful display, with scattered plants elsewhere. Henbit *Lamium amplexicaule*, Field Gromwell *Lithospermum arvense* and Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia exigua* were found in several places. We even found some Venus’s Looking-glass *Legousia hybrida*. Our one disappointment was a shortage of poppies – we only found a couple of Rough Poppies *Papaver hybridum*. We rounded off the morning by eating lunch sitting on a bank by the edge of this plot, with extensive views southwards.

The weather was changing ominously, so after lunch we returned to the cars and investigated a stone-curlew plot in the adjacent field, enabling a rapid retreat if the impending rain arrived. When we got to it, this plot was a surprising contrast, clearly sprayed out, but having the remains of abundant rough and Prickly Poppies *P. argemone*. The rain descended and, deciding we were obviously not on Henry Edmunds’ land and hence trespassing, we retreated quickly to the cars and returned to the farm shop for tea. Visits to the Cholderton Estate always give a fascinating insight into the benefits of organic farming and show how agriculture and wildlife can be completely compatible. How much we have lost from less sensitively-managed farmland! Congratulations to Henry Edmunds on winning the 2012 RSPB Telegraph Nature of Farming Award – justly deserved, as our visit showed.

*Sue Fitzpatrick*
9th September 2012

Plaitford and West Wellow Commons

Leader: Dave Green

Fourteen of us arrived at Plaitford and Wellow Common with the most perfect late summer weather, sunny with only wisps of fair-weather cloud in the sky and a light breeze. Somehow it felt like the last day of summer.

Dave Green and Mark and Clare Kitchen took us out of our comfort zone, away from more familiar habitats which are typical for Wiltshire, showing us an array of wet and dry heath plants on very acid soil. Not only were there unfamiliar species to some of us but the large herd of New Forest ponies and cattle present had grazed most things to a diminutive size such as Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia coerulea*).

The site was classic New Forest Common Land with Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub and wobbly floating Sphagnum bogs.

On wetter ground amongst the Sphagnum some of the species we found were Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), Marsh St John’s-wort (*Hypericum elodes*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*), Water-purslane (*Peplis portula*), Small water-pepper (*Persicaria minor*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), Marsh Club-moss (*Lycopodiella inundatum*), fragrant Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), White Sedge (*Carex curta*) and Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*) with its viviparous growth; Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*) grew in abundance, be-jewelling the ground and glistening in the sunshine.

On drier areas we found Autumn Lady’s-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*), Dwarf Gorse (*Ulex minor and Ulex gallii*), Annual Pearlwort (*Sagina apetala*), Bird’s-foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*), and Petty Whin (*Genista anglica*) to name but a few.

Anne made a very satisfactory number of records although we did not find any Pillwort (*Pilularia globifera*) or the rare Rosa spp. which have previously been recorded.

The habitat showed us that you can’t always make easy assumptions. Some species had Mark and Dave in debate e.g. terrestrial form of Fool’s-water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*) versus Lesser Marshwort (*Apium inundatum*); leaves of Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*) had people puzzled as they were much reduced by grazing and were without the characteristic downy undersides. Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) was another question-mark species. Dave recommended Pat to make a return visit earlier in the next season when it would be in flower; this was found in the middle of an exceptionally large bog!

One of the residents from the edge of Common was leaning on his gate watching the spectacle of botanists on their knees with eye-glasses, he was most intrigued. We showed him the Autumn Ladies-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) which he had never noticed before even though they were but a step away from his gate.

A very enjoyable day and much learnt.

Penny Lee
Seven of us joined Jack on a beautiful sunny day to explore the intricacies of native Whitebeams, Rowans, Service Trees and Cotoneasters, all of which are well-represented in his arboretum. As usual, Jack was very well-prepared and each participant was handed an A3 sheet showing the six Sorbus subgenera (Sorbus, Aria, Torminaria, Soraria, Tormaria and Cormus), with colour-coded examples of the leaves of species in each subgenus (see below). He told us that in the second edition of ‘The New Flora of the British Isles’ (Stace) 25 taxa were represented, but that by the time the third edition came out in 2010, this had more than doubled to 51! Of these, 36 were native and 31 endemic to the British Isles. (NB: Current work by Dave Green and Tim Rich is adding even more new species!) The Avon Gorge is a Sorbus hotspot and as we know from a visit to the Wye Valley last year, there are quite a number there too. Many grow in inaccessible sites on cliffs and require abseiling skills and a head for heights to reach them, so we were fortunate to be able to see quite a few specimens, including several endemics in the safe environment of Jack’s arboretum!

We admired naturalised flowering plants of Cephalaria gigantea, a large cream-coloured scabious native to the Caucasus and northern Turkey that Jack told us could even out-compete nettles, before being introduced to some Cotoneasters of which there are about 400 species, hybrids and cultivars. Then we faced the challenge of working through the key in the recent BSBI Guide ‘Whitebeams, Rowans and Service Trees of Britain and Ireland’ (Rich, Houston, Robertson and Proctor 2010) to identify a number of different specimens of...
Sorbus, representing the various subgenera. Deciding whether or not a leaf is lobed was not as simple as it seems! There is also more than one Sorbus with pinnate leaves - our native Rowan (Sorbus aucuparia) in the Sorbus subgenus, apparently has a look-alike, Sorbus domestica in the Cormus subgenus, so we learned from Jack to check if the buds were furry and asymmetrical for S. aucuparia or symmetrical and non-furry for S. domestica (Service Tree, distinct from Wild Service Tree, S. torminalis). It was a great help to see so many Sorbus together in one place, with the opportunity to look at the differences between them under expert tuition. Unfortunately, trees in the wild don’t come with nice labels…!

The arboretum is home to many other rare and beautiful trees and although concentrating on Sorbus and Cotoneaster, we weren’t able to pass them all by. We paused to admire the Savernake Cluster Oak (Quercus robur var cristata), endemic to Wiltshire and also the well named Hedgehog or Spanish Fir (Abies pinsapo). I have been privileged to see this rare fir in its native habitat in Andalucia, so it was good to renew my acquaintance with it. A specimen of Cupressus gigantea from Lhasa where it grows in the Tsangpo Gorge, that is three times deeper than the Grand Canyon, had reached deepest Wiltshire via Edinburgh Botanic Garden. A plant with strange looking fruit turned out to be Crataemespilus grandiflora, a hybrid between Hawthorn and Medlar.

We spent a very interesting morning with Jack and his tree collection and came away knowing much more about some of our native Sorbus trees and the Cotoneasters that we might find naturalised in the countryside and towns. Thanks very much to Jack for all the effort he put into making our visit a success. Now I really must look more closely at the Rowans and Whitebeams we have growing in our garden.…

Anne Appleyard

Saturday, 20 October 2012, afternoon

Fern Identification at Bentley Wood

Leader: Pat Woodruffe

We gathered at the Barn in Bentley Wood after our morning’s fungus foray, sat in the sun and ate our picnics.

When we got down to work (or was it play?), Pat had lots of ferns for us to look at, both green and pressed specimens. She started with the basics - how many times the fern frond divides into smaller parts – into pinnae and then into pinnules:

- not divided at all (Hart’s Tongue);
- divided once (Polypody);
- twice (Male Ferns);
- three times (Buckler Ferns).

Then the detail; we looked at the lacy Lady Fern (Athyrium filix-femina), contrasting it with the hunkier Common Male Fern (Dryopteris filix-mas) and then compared the Broad Buckler Fern (Dryopteris dilatata) which grows in “shuttlecocks” with the rarer Narrow Buckler Fern (D. carthusiana) which sends up fronds at random angles from a creeping rootstock. Shield Ferns have a “thumb” at the base of their pinnules; the detailed shape of the pinnules distinguishes the Hard Shield Fern (Polystichum aculeatum) from the Soft Shield Fern (P. setiferum), which is more common in Wiltshire.

The Scaly Male Ferns (named because of the membranous scales on the stalk of the frond) were more of a challenge. Recently, three sub-species have been promoted to species status; no doubt this will change again as soon as we get used to the present classification. All have a dark patch where the pinna meets the central stem (the rachis) and this distinguishes them from the...
Common Male Fern. Then you have to look at the shape of the pinnules (the finest leaflets), noting the shape of the tip and its teeth. The AIDGAP Fern Guide\(^1\) makes this clear, but, as ever, natural specimens don’t always conform. We have two species in Wiltshire, the Golden or Scaly Male Fern \(D.\) \textit{affinis} and Borrer’s Male Fern \(D.\) \textit{Borreri}; the third one, Narrow Scaly Male Fern \(D.\) \textit{Cambrensis}, is found further west. We should try to get to species level if possible and not just stop at \(“D.\) \textit{affinis}\ agg.” Sharon Pilkington gives details in a following article and will happily check the ID of any specimens sent to her.

Lastly we looked at three attractive little wall ferns, Maidenhair Spleenwort \((Asplenium\ trichomanes)\), Wall Rue \((Asplenium\ ruta-muraria)\) and Rustyback \((Asplenium\ cetarach)\).

Pat gave out an excellent information sheet that covered the distinguishing features of the various woodland ferns, available from Pat

Richard Aisbitt

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A Co-Recorder for Wiltshire

It is with great pleasure that I announce that Richard Aisbitt has joined me as BSBI Recorder for Wiltshire (vice-counties 7 and 8). Richard brings a wealth of expertise to the role and I am positive that working together we will be able to support botanical activities in Wiltshire much better than I can on my own.

In practical terms, little will change, at least in the short term. Richard’s strengths lie mainly in data handling and analysis of plant records/botanical data whilst I work best with aspects of plant identification, recorder support and training. So put simply, Richard will concentrate on records whilst I will continue to immerse myself in plants. In time, Richard will hopefully develop his role to include more support to recording in VC7 (North Wiltshire). Please note that for continuity, I shall remain the main point of contact for BSBI recording initiatives including the current Atlas Updating Project.

Looking back, it is hard to believe that I have been the BSBI VC recorder since early 2004, when I took over from Dave Green in the north, and Ann Hutchison in the south. At that time I was new to Wiltshire and worked as an ecologist for a consultancy in Bath; my evenings and weekends were pretty much my own. All that changed in 2007 when I set up my own business and ‘free’ time became much scarcer. I have been aware for the last few years that I have not offered Wiltshire’s volunteer botanists as much of my time as I would have liked, especially between June and October when my professional commitments invariably escalate.

Looking around for help, Richard was an obvious choice of co-recorder. He has supported me on many occasions, helping with tricky data analysis and transfer issues, as well as undertaking the bulk of the computerisation of the thousands of records that WBS members generate every year. On top of this he has methodically improved his own botanical skills by completing an MSc degree from the University of Birmingham.

Richard and I will be working closely together to support WBS activities and members and we will both be more than happy to answer any questions about this new arrangement (contact details on the back of the newsletter).

Sharon Pilkington

BSBI Recorder (Wiltshire)

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\(^1\) \textit{The Fern Guide, 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition} 2007, James Merryweather, Field Studies Council, currently £7.50 from NHBS or the Field Studies Council
Scaly Male-ferns in Wiltshire

Sharon Pilkington

At Pat Woodruffe’s very successful fern identification workshop at Bentley Wood in October, the differences between the scaly male-ferns formerly grouped together as the *Dryopteris affinis* aggregate were ably demonstrated. Recent changes in taxonomy in the world of British ferns now mean that there are three recognised species of scaly male-fern, two of which are found in Wiltshire’s woodlands.

With so much active recording now going on across the county, I would like to encourage WBS members to record the different scaly male-ferns as far as possible.

All three species form large shuttlecock-like clumps, grow in woodland (or sometimes hedgerows) and are typically very scaly. Most populations in Wiltshire appear to be Golden-scaled Male-fern *Dryopteris affinis*, which can be further assigned to three subspecies if you are a fern expert (not recommended...
The differences between the three scaly male-ferns are subtle but will become familiar with practice. There are various characters that can be used to separate them but I have listed some of the best ones below. Sometimes individuals appear to be intermediate and it may not be possible to identify them to species level with confidence. In such instances the use of ‘D. affinis aggregate’ is perfectly acceptable. I will be happy to try to identify species from whole fronds sent to me.

### Differences between the three Scaly Male-ferns D. affinis agg.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxon</th>
<th>Pinnule teeth</th>
<th>Indusium</th>
<th>Frond hardiness</th>
<th>Lamina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>D. affinis</em></td>
<td>Inconspicuous and rounded</td>
<td>Thick; persists for years on old fronds</td>
<td>Fronds persist in winter</td>
<td>Thick, with a glossy upper surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>D. borreri</em></td>
<td>Acute and prominent at the corners</td>
<td>Thin; deciduous (does not persist)</td>
<td>Fronds usually die down in winter</td>
<td>Dull surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>D. cambrensis</em></td>
<td>Inconspicuous and rounded</td>
<td>Thick; may persist after spore release</td>
<td>Fronds die down in winter</td>
<td>Glossy surface; narrow outline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Squinancy-wort

On several site visits this summer, members have expressed an interest in the origins of the English names of some of the plants we have found. This has prompted me to consult my library and particularly the wonderful classic by Geoffrey Grigson, ‘The Englishman’s Flora’, first published in 1955. This provides a wealth of information on plant folklore, the uses to which particular plants were put, their local names and often the date and source of the first record for each plant in Great Britain.

The account for Squinancy-wort is brief, but interesting, as it gives a Wiltshire connection. Squinancy is another name for the quinsy, a sore throat. Any plant with ‘wort’ in its name was considered to have a beneficial herbal use and squinancy- or quinsy-wort made an astringent gargle.

Richard Mabey, in ‘Flora Britannica’ (1996), says the flowers are vanilla-scented, but I’ve never got my nose close enough to it to confirm if this is true.

According to Grigson, the first record for the plant in the British Isles comes from our own Silbury Hill near Avebury. This appears to have been a favoured stop-off point for botanists travelling from London to Bath. The Flemish botanist De l’Obel described it in his ‘Stirpium adversaria nova’ in 1570 as this ‘steep chalky dry hill raised by military art’ (‘acclivem cretaceam et arridam montem arte militari aggestum’). Here, he found a plant that he called Anglica Saxifraga flowering in July and August that seems to have been Squinancy-wort. My Latin, from ‘O’ Level many years ago, is not quite up to going back to the original source, so I will take Grigson’s word for this!

Anne Appleyard

Editors Corner

The smaller-format newsletter is an experiment to save printing costs and postage (it can be sent as a “small letter”). Please let me know if you have strong feelings about the new format. The newsletter will be available A4 size (in colour) from the southwiltwes web address below.

Tim Kaye is developing a shiny new website for us, which should be available before long. It should still be at our current address, www.wiltsbotsoc.co.uk.

Please send any items for the winter 2012-2013 newsletter (issue 41) by Friday 22 March 2013. Post to Richard Aisbitt, 84 Goddard Avenue, Swindon, Wilts SN1 4HT, or email to richard@theaisbitts.co.uk.

The New Subscription of £15 comes into force in January 2013. Please could you complete the enclosed form and give it to your bank if you wish to pay by standing order.

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

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