

# NEWSLETTER

Issue 38

Summer 2011

# WILTSHIRE BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2011**

## **Porton Down Junipers**

Leaders: Anne Appleyard  
and Pat Woodruffe

This was a working party to enlist the help of members with an ongoing project to recount the juniper bushes on the Porton Ranges, owned by Defence Estates. The site straddles the Wiltshire/Hampshire boundary and we are working with the VC 12 Recorder, Tony Mundell to ensure a comparable methodology. The junipers were last counted in the 1970s by Lena Ward, when a total of about 18,000 bushes, the biggest population of juniper in the south of England, was reached. Since then, there has been very little regeneration and many bushes have succumbed as a result of old age, the depredations of the large rabbit

population and other causes. This problem is not confined to Porton, but affects all old juniper populations in the south of England. A recent Plantlife project and an allied project at Porton, aim to overcome the lack of regeneration by collecting, processing and sowing juniper seeds in scrapes and protective cages and by taking cuttings for planting out.

We met in the car park to pick up passes and then proceeded in convoy to Moll Harris's Clump, where we were to survey the area between the clump and the Pheasant Road. Many people will have driven this road and seen the juniper bushes, but as access is restricted, would not have been able to take a closer look until now. Pat and Anne outlined the

**18,000 juniper  
bushes in the  
1970s**



*A cage to protect juniper seedlings*



Male juniper cones



Female juniper with berries

work being undertaken on the Porton Ranges, showed the group how to distinguish between male and female juniper bushes and discussed the problems of juniper regeneration. The twelve participants then divided into two teams to mark out 100 x 100 metre squares using hand held GPS and canes. However did we manage before the availability of GPS?! Complete squares with lots of bushes were then further divided into 50 x 50 metre squares for ease of counting. Each group spaced out and tried to walk in straight lines, counting the bushes between them and the next person to the right. This was fine in theory, but not always easy in practice, when faced with impenetrable juniper and other scrub – juniper bushes are very prickly! It was difficult too, to decide how many different juniper bushes there were in dense patches, as spreading bushes often layer and cover a considerable area. Only if bushes of both sexes were present could we

sometimes be sure. We also distinguished between healthy and senile/dying bushes and counted any dead junipers we encountered. GPS readings were taken for more isolated, scattered bushes. We were working in a fenced area and the Pheasant Road cuts across some squares, so a number were not completed and there is plenty of work still to do to achieve the finished counts!

Altogether, we reached a total of nearly 650 living junipers, of which about 12% were moribund. Twenty-six dead bushes were recorded. Pat has tabulated the counts and also overlain the numbers on a grid on an aerial photograph and these will contribute to results for the site as a whole.

Once we had completed what we set out to do, we turned our attention to other plant life in the area and recorded what we could find. It was too early to see many of the more interesting of the species found on the site, but anthills yielded

Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*), Thyme-leaved Sandwort (*Arenaria serpyllifolia*) and Common Whitlowgrass (*Erophila verna*). Leaves of Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), a plant very common on the ranges, were also apparent. Presumably the rabbits don't like the taste, as most other vegetation was nibbled very short!

Thanks to all who took part in the working party. We will report on the total juniper count in due course.

Anne Appleyard and Pat Woodruffe

Many bushes have succumbed to old age

### An optimistic footnote

Stuart Corbett has compared this survey with one done by Lena Ward in the 1970's. This showed that one area now has many more junipers. If the change is genuine, there may have been some unrecorded regeneration since the 70's. It will be interesting to compare the change with the known vegetation/rabbit number history for the site.



Hairy Violet



Early Forget-me-not : Pat Woodruffe

Wednesday 27 April  
2011

# Collingbourne Woods

Leader: John Moon



Toothwort

Sixteen members gathered for a walk round the woods on a bright sunny day, very seasonable but we had got used to the hot weather at Easter and the wind felt keen. The woods were at their best with the new beech leaves and carpets of bluebell. Right at the entrance to the wood we saw a large patch of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) as well as Goldilocks (*Ranunculus auricomus*). There were Wood



Wood Vetch

Photos by  
Sonia  
Heywood

**Toothwort,  
Bitter Vetch,  
Solomon's  
Seal,  
Meadow  
Saffron, Herb  
Paris ...**



Wood Vetch stipules



Solomon's Seal (with Herb Paris)



Bitter Vetch flowers



Bitter Vetch pods

Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*) which were going over. We also saw Bitter Vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*) lots of vigorous Wood Vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*), Slender St John's Wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*), Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*), Water Avens (*Geum rivale*), Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia*

*nemorum*) and many others. As promised we saw plenty of Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*) and with the help of a GPS found several patches of Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*). Quadrifolia (four leaves) is a bit of a misnomer. There were plenty of specimens with four leaves, but also five, six and even seven.

After a picnic lunch 13 of us walked through the wood that is once the group had identified Lamb's Lettuce (*Valerianella locusta*) which grew in patches on the verge. The walk through beech and bluebell was beautiful and the sight that greeted us was amazing. At first there was Herb Paris dotted around but then we reached a huge patch. Well worth the walk. We went to Collingbourne Woods some years ago, a memorable trip and this year's return did not disappoint. Our thanks to John and Judy who helped us see some of the jewels of this wood, but had to leave quickly because of a sick chicken.

Sonia Heywood



Herb Paris with six leaves



Native Black Poplar - Joan Davies

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011

## Stonebridge Lane Meadow, Marlborough

Leaders: Jack Oliver and Joan Davies

On Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011, sixteen members of Wiltshire Botanical Society carried out a plant survey at Stonebridge Lane Meadow, Marlborough, which is a 15 acre site on the south side of the river Kennet in the eastern part of the town. The request was made by Action for the River Kennet who with Marlborough Town Council had recently purchased the meadow and river bank as an amenity site for the town and they wanted to know what was growing there before they made plans on how to look after the site in the future.

Until about 8 years ago the meadow had been farmed, but for the past few years it has been sold a number of times

and purchased by people who had tried to get planning permission for houses but had failed as the site is on the flood plain of the river.

The survey was led by Jack Oliver who in early May had made a preliminary visit to see what was growing in the meadow. Copies of his results were given to members so that they didn't have to write out a long list of common plants. More plants were found on the day, with the highlight being the very interesting and exceptional finding by Sharon Pilkington of eight Native female Black Poplars, *Populus nigra* subsp. *betulifolia* on the southern bank of the river, between SU 19446 69303 and SU 19552 69447. Although there are many hybrid black poplars in England, native Black Poplars are now very rare with an estimated 7,000 male, and 600 female trees, most of which are old and decaying. Sharon told us that she had seen some other female native black poplars which had recently been identified in the Cotswold Water Park. Gareth Harris of the Cotswold Water Park Trust has been working on



Pemphigus gall on Black Poplar leaf

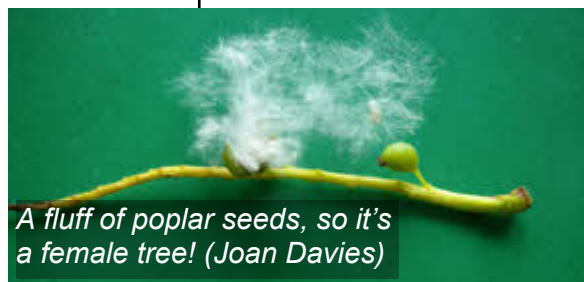
### Native Black Poplars are now very rare in England

propagating these trees. The trees in Stonebridge Meadows have low easy to reach branches, which would make them ideal as donor plants for propagation. On looking at the poplar leaves a gall was found on two of the trees. The gall was *Pemphigus populi* which is rare, as it appears that the native black poplar is its only host.

It was very pleasant walking along the path near the river. In addition to the poplars there were nine varieties of *Salix* (Willow) with reeds, sedges and yellow irises, *Iris pseudacorus* in flower along the river bank. Near the wooden bridge over the river, an ideal spot for a picnic, Sharon found six different mosses and liverworts.

There was a greater variety of plants around the edges of the meadow than in the middle, with the total findings of 36 trees, shrubs and woody climbers, 82 herbaceous plants, 28 grasses and sedges, eight other monocots and one fern. Anne met a grass snake and Paul and Jane identified three beetles, a weevil, moths, caterpillars of the Scarlet Tiger moth and a gall, *Liposthenus glechomae* on the Ground Ivy.

Joan Davies



A fluff of poplar seeds, so it's a female tree! (Joan Davies)

Monday 23 May 2011,  
morning

## Sutton Lane Meadows

Leaders: Keith Steggall  
(National Trust) and Richard  
Aisbitt

The National Trust own Sutton Lane Meadows, which include two small fields with SSSI status and a third, which looked just as good, (as yet) outside the SSSI boundary. Keith Steggall, the manager from NT, guided us round and prompted us for plants we might miss. We aimed to produce a species list for the site, but, as usual, also to enjoy the visit. The site was covered in flowers, with Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), Common Birdsfoot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and wide patches of Lesser Trefoil (*Trifolium dubium*) providing an over-riding yellow. Black Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) was just beginning to flower, providing a purple contrast. Rosemary noticed a oddity in a patch of non-flowering knapweed that looked wrong; branching, hairiness and leaf shape were all very similar, but leaves were a pale green rather than the blue-green of knapweed. This turned out to be Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), which will cover patches of the site with white flowers later in the year.

We had timed the visit to so we could see orchids in flower, but the long spell of warm, sunny, dry weather meant that most of them were over. However, there were still some fine spikes of Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) amongst many which had gone over and a scattering of Green-winged Orchids (*Orchis morio*), all of them past their best. Keith counts the spikes each year and generally finds hundreds of each species.

We only found four *Carex* species: *flacca*, *hirta*, *remota* and *otruba*. Downy Oat-grass

**The site was covered in flowers**

**Seven species of fern scattered through the wood**

**... such a heavy shade that nothing grows underneath**

(*Avenula pubescens* – previously *Helictotrichon*) was a little confusing because the young flowers have straight awns, rather than the bent ones described in the guides. Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) and vigorous Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosa*) grew in the lower, damper parts of ridge-and-furrow, with continuous Hemlock Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) along the ditch. Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*) scattered in the grass in the northeast corner of the SSSI provided the last notable find, with its spreading, broad, glossy leaves holding fleshy, three-angled seed pods.

### Afternoon

## Birds Marsh Wood

Leader: Richard Aisbitt



Scaly Male Ferns

Only three of us stayed for the afternoon visit. Most of Birds Marsh Wood is overgrown with *Rhododendron Ponticum* and *Prunus laurocerasus* (Cherry Laurel). Even though the blooms and scent of the *Rhododendron* are delightful, their dense evergreen foliage on arching trunks casts a heavy shade that nothing grows underneath, making a convincing case against at least one invasive alien plant.

It was not all gloom; some huge oaks (*Quercus robur*) and

almost equally large False Acacias (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) with craggy fissured bark towered over the offending evergreens. Also, parts of the wood, particularly the edges and northern border, are still free from Rhodies and provided us with interesting botanising. The soil was sandy, as revealed by the root plate of a fallen beech tree, which explained the stands of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). We found another seven fern species scattered through the wood: Soft and Hard Shield Ferns; the common Male Fern and huge shuttlecocks of Scaly Male; Broad Buckler, Hart's Tongue and Intermediate Polypody. The bryophytes on moist banks, tree bases and big fallen trunks looked interesting, but we did not investigate these. Other interesting finds were the spectacular apricot-coloured fungal brackets of Chicken-of-the-Woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*), Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*) and Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*) and a thicket of small plants in mud beside the path that turned out to be Skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*) not yet in flower.

Richard Aisbitt



Fern pinules - which species?

Chicken-of-the-Woods



Sonia getting its photo

Saturday 28th May 2011

# Figsbury Rings and Pitton byway

Leader: Leif Bersweden

Figsbury Rings were windswept on this Saturday morning but 18 undeterred botanists saw many specialist chalk downland plants. Fragrant and Common spotted Orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea* and *Dactylorhiza fuchsia* were flowering, but even a hands-and-knees search could not find any sign of Frog Orchids! However, we did succeed in spotting some Bastard Toadflax *Thesium humifusum* just coming into flower. Both Chalk and Common milkworts *Polygala calcarea* and *P. vulgaris* were flowering, so too were Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* and Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. On a calmer and warmer day we would have seen the blue butterflies reared on these food-plants, but any present were

hunkered down in the shelter of long grass and invisible to us.

Photos by Leif

explored an area along a side track, where several large Lesser Butterfly Orchids *Platanthera bifolia* were in full bloom, and a patch of Bath Asparagus *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* was just coming into flower.

On the way back to the cars we stopped in the corner of an arable field and were rewarded with a profusion of 'weeds' including Small Toadflax *Chaenorhinum minus*, Venus's Looking-glass *Legousia hybrida*, several speedwells *Veronica persica*, *V. arvensis*, Common Fumitory *Fumaria officinalis*, and both Round and Sharp-leaved Fluellens *Kickxia spuria* and *K. elatine*.

Many thanks to Leif Bersweden for taking time out from his studies to show us these varied and rich sites.

Sue Fitzpatrick



Fly Orchid

Lunch in the Figsbury car park was enlivened by some fresh Knapweed Broomrapes *Orobanche elatior* beside us and a patch of White Helleborines *Cephalanthera damasonium* under the beech tree sheltering us. After lunch a small convoy of packed cars moved to the restricted parking area near the Pitton byway. This old track went between well-established hedges and then through older woodland, some formerly coppiced but now escaping the intrusive management and planting visible further into the wood. Alongside the byway was an area with abundant Fly Orchids *Ophrys insectifera*, some in very good condition although we were a bit late for the main flowering. Further on we

Abundant Fly Orchids

White Helleborines under a beech tree



Lesser Butterfly Orchid



Spiked Stat-of-Bethlehem



The wide open roadside verge

Saturday, 11 June 2011  
**Tilshead roadside verge**

Around 20 society members and Protected Verge scheme personnel met on this 690m chalk grassland verge to record plants and help monitors with identification. The scheme covers fifty road verges in Wiltshire which are designated as Protected Road Verges because of the importance of their fauna, flora or geological features and are subject to special management or oversight by the Wiltshire Council and its contractors. It is managed by the Council and the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre



Pale Flax

**Photos by John**

**The scheme covers fifty road verges in Wiltshire**

**Knapweed Broomrape (*Orobanche elatior*), a plant with no green parts, parasitic on Greater Knapweed**

(WSBRC), a part of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The role of the project is to monitor the sites and to guide and facilitate their appropriate management for biodiversity by advising owners and planning bodies. A volunteer monitor keeps a watch on each reserve, records its flora and reports annually to the Records Centre. A detailed account of the scheme and descriptions of some other verges is expected to be published in the next issue of *Wiltshire Botany*.

The Tilshead verge is particularly rich, despite being on a busy main road. Participants on the outing found a good range of plants representative of chalk grassland and a number of others. The most exciting species is Knapweed Broomrape (*Orobanche elatior*), a plant with no green parts, parasitic on Greater Knapweed. Several young flower shoots were seen, but its flowering



Pale Flax flower



Grass Vetchling flower ...

... and in fruit

period is later. Among the other interesting plants found were Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Dwarf Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*), Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*), Burnet Saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*), all from the pre-existing list for the verge, and some additions, such as Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), and Pale Flax (*Linum bienne*) (a rare casual in Wiltshire). There were also some non-native invaders, including Greater Periwinkle (*Vinca major*). In all, the number of species recorded approached 90.

The range of plants facilitated help to monitors. For instance, there were three species of vetch - *Vicia sativa*, *V. hirsuta* and *V. cracca*, enabling their distinguishing features to be pointed out.

The visit can be counted a success, confirming the presence of known species and discovering new ones and providing help to monitors during an interesting and enjoyable morning.

John Presland



Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011

## Salisbury Plain Training Area – central

Leader: Sharon Pilkington

Sharon Pilkington had obtained permission for us to visit part of the Salisbury Plain Training area during the afternoon. The Plain is well known for its botanical gems and we were not disappointed. Most of us saw several plants with which we were not at all familiar as well as a host of good friends. Rarities aside, it is always wonderful to see the extent of these grasslands and to think of the uses to which the land might have been put if the MOD had not begun its purchases over 100 years ago.

The tank tracks may not seem to be prime habitat for rarities but they do allow annuals to be distributed and to germinate in open ground. Fine-leaved Sandwort *Minuartia hybrida* was one such plant and also Sticky Mouse-ear *Cerastium glomeratum*. Sharon explained how this annual is now well past its best whilst its close relative Common Mouse-ear *C. fontanum*, which is perennial, is still green despite the extremely dry season. Fern Grass *Catapodium rigidum* (a stiff grass that vaguely resembles a small fern) was also present in this bare ground and, perhaps the find of the afternoon, Corn Camomile *Anthemis arvensis* which, to the untrained eye, looked much like a number of the mayweed group. The first clue lies in its downy or woolly stem and the second in the lanceolate / mucronate scales on the receptacle. 'Rose' has some useful diagrams. We were delighted to find numerous plants of this IUCN endangered species in a previously unknown location. I for one could easily have walked past it, and that is the great bonus of going out with a group of really knowledgeable botanists.

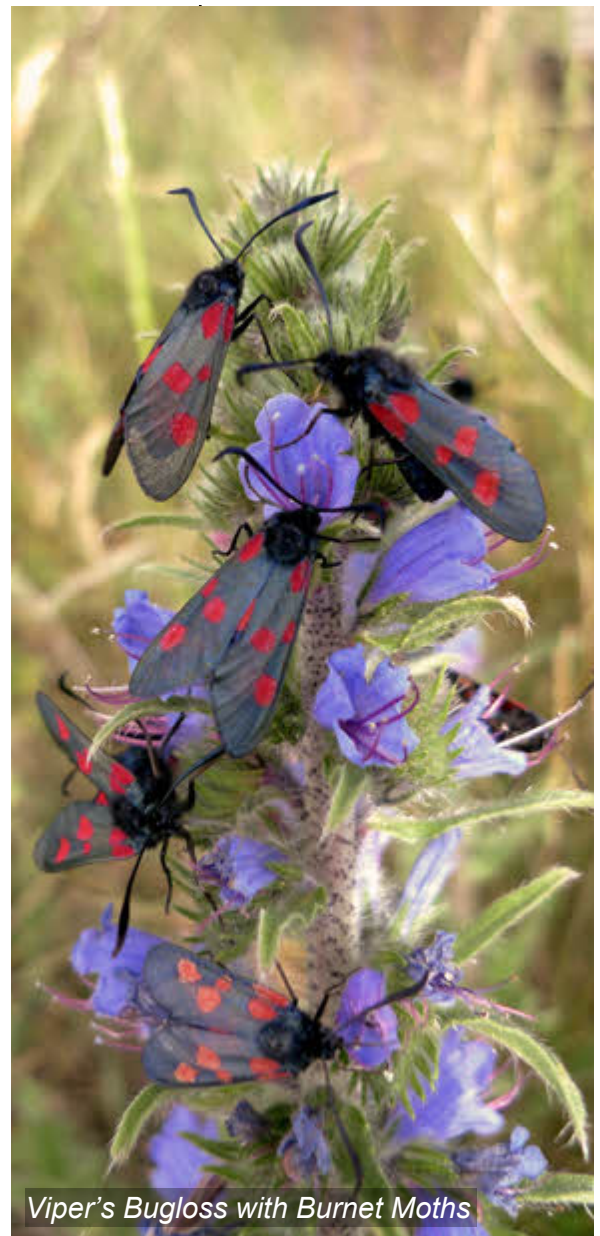
In the early part of the afternoon several species of butterfly enjoyed warm sunshine. Adonis, Small and Common Blues, Marbled White, Burnet, Black-neck and Forester Moths as well as Garden Chaffer were all out and about. A large Drinker caterpillar was also seen.

We ventured into a piece of woodland that didn't seem too promising - but did yield a few spikes of White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium* under some mature beech trees.

Back out on the open grasslands we found Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, and two interesting invaders. Annual Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis muralis* is a small yellow crucifer that is well established in UK whilst Hairy Rocket *Erucastrum gallicum* is a more recent introduction that is believed to have come to this country from Germany, presumably as a result of training exercises. Sharon assured us that the latter is instantly recognisable by its unusual lemon to pale green / cream flowers.

As always, we must thank Sharon for her patience, for sharing her knowledge and for spending some of her precious time helping us. It is very much appreciated by all.

Pat Woodruffe



Viper's Bugloss with Burnet Moths

Photos by  
Pat



Black-neck Moth



Sunday 19 June 2011,  
morning

## Smallbrook Meadows, Warminster

Leader: Becky Morris

Fourteen of us, including two children in pushchairs, gathered at Smallbrook meadows, Warminster to record wetland plants. We were led by Becky Morris and accompanied by the Warden of the Reserve, Clive Thomas.

We walked along the Smallbrook stream, a tributary of the River Wylye, running through extensive rich



*Dactylorhiza x hallii*

Photos -  
Michael  
Ponting

meadows. The first plants to grab our attention were tall pink spikes of Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. Further along, we noted Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre* and then a lovely patch of bright pink Russian Comfrey *Symphytum x uplandicum*: a beautiful plant for gardens because of its non-spreading habit, unlike other members of the genus.

Wandering close to the stream we came to a pool crossed by a mossy trunk with Common Polypody *Polypodium vulgare* growing from it and below, a spreading Male Fern, *Dryopteris filix-mas*. Over the stream, branches a suckering English Elm, *Ulmus procera*. Further along there were patches of Lesser Pond Sedge, *Carex acutiformis*. A Beautiful Demoiselle (a damselfly) landed on Richard's hand, chilled into a state of inactivity, which gave us all a chance to photograph it.

Growing in the stream bed was Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*. In the water, Fools



Beautiful Demoiselle

Parsley *Apium nodiflorum*, Unbranched Burr-reed *Sparganium erectum* and Watercress *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*.

We crossed the stream and turned into another wide meadow on the opposite bank with spikes of False Fox Sedge *Carex otrubae*; further on we saw a small group of *Dactylorhiza maculata* x *D. praetermissa* = *D. x hallii*, a hybrid orchid with characteristic spots or blotches on the leaves. We also saw a number of Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* scattered through the meadow.

Also Bog Stitchwort *Stellaria alsine*, Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata* and Square-stalked St John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum*. At the end of the walk we passed a lone Aspen *Populus tremula*, leaves clattering in the wind, and some old apple trees.

We ended by picnicking beside the river having had an absorbing morning, and not a drop of rain.

Maureen Ponting



Un-branched Burr-reed

Sunday, 19 June 2011 - afternoon

## Cley Hill, Warminster

Leader: Becky Morris

After the morning's visit to Smallbrook Meadows and lunch beside the Wylde only six hardy individuals remained for the afternoon's expedition to Cley Hill SSSI. Lift shares arranged, we drove to the foot of the megalithic hill fort and round barrow. Rising some 80m above the surrounding land this mound dominates the western outskirts of Warminster. Geologically it is an outlier of the Middle and Upper Chalk capped with a thin layer of Tertiary sands and gravels. Over the millennia it has undergone much anthropological modification and is currently capped with an Ordnance Survey Trig point.

The 26.6-hectare SSSI, owned and maintained by the National Trust, was notified for the botanically rich chalk grassland that appears on the steep slopes on all sides of hill. Within this grassland many of the distinctive plants of the downs appear complete with two species with nationally restricted distribution: the early gentian *Gentianella anglica* and bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum*. The sward is kept closely cropped by a herd of semi-resident and very curious Dexter cattle.

We were welcomed to the site (a shortish walk from the car-park) by a small but perfectly formed bee orchard *Ophrys apifera*. Circumnavigating the hill to find the wide track on the north-eastern side we came across patches of Sainfoin *Onobrychis viciifolia*. On this north-eastern side of the hill stood the remains of the hundreds of early gentian that had flowered this year. Mixed with these slightly crispy specimens was an abundance of orchids (fragrant *Gymnadenia conopsea*,

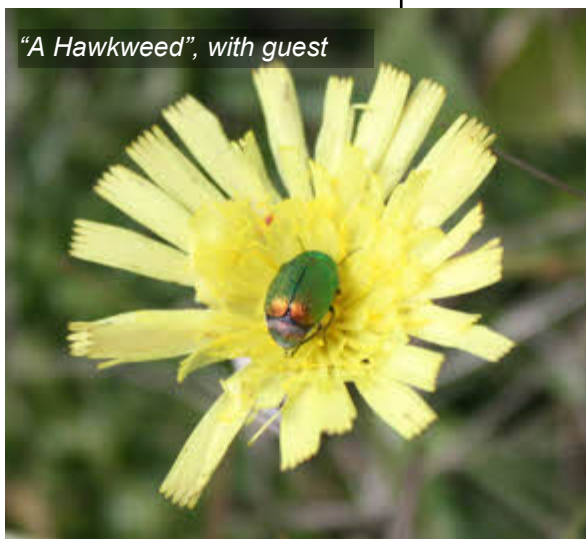
Summer 2011



*Dactylodenia st-quintinii*

common spotted *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and pyramidal *Anacamptis pyramidalis*) together with a single specimen of the hybrid between fragrant and common spotted X *Dactylodenia st-quintinii*. This side of the hill further lived up to its designation with a multitude of short sward chalk grassland species including chalk milkwort *Polygala calcarea*, rock rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*.

Arriving at the top of the hill where the grassland becomes more nutrient (and less species) rich we were treated to views



"A Hawkweed", with guest

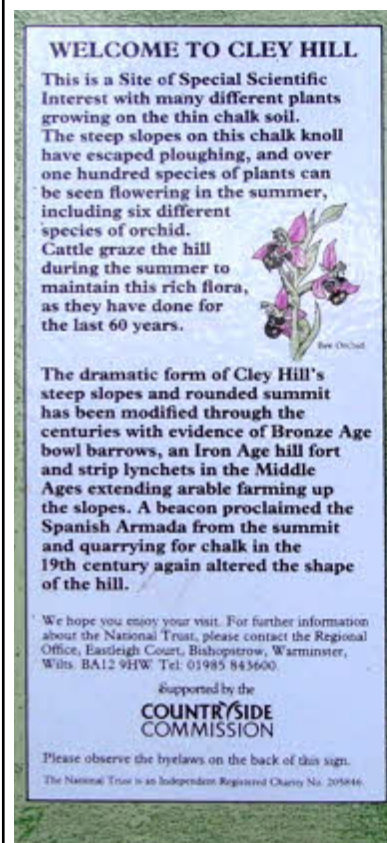
Photos -  
Becky Morris

Right:  
part of the  
Countryside  
Commission  
information  
board

across to Frome to the south and Salisbury plain to the north. A little clearer and you can see all the way across Somerset. Here, still clearly visible as deep depressions in the grassland, are the ditches and dykes the ancient peoples had constructed to secure their dwellings left now only to defend the triangular pillar of the concrete trig point and the castles of children's game's kings.

Descending to the south of the hill we came across a scurrying common lizard and a bright green forester moth. Descending further we entered a quarry where chalk was extracted for burning in limekilns. Dwelling amongst the grassy humps and hillocks of the quarry were brown-lipped snail and a thriving community of the moss *Entodon concinnus*. Exiting the quarry led us rapidly back to the entrance and having completed the round trip the meeting broke-up in time for afternoon tea (4 O'clock).

Tom Morris



Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2011

# Winterbourne Downs RSPB Reserve, Newton Tony

Leaders: Anne Appleyard  
and Sue Fitzpatrick

The object of the exercise was to involve more members of the society in the annual monitoring of an arable reversion field on the reserve called, for reasons unknown, Football Field. It would be a very strange choice of location to play football, given that it is far from flat! Anne and Geoffrey Appleyard helped to sow seed from chalk grassland SSSIs here by hand in autumn 2006 and Anne, with help from various others, has monitored the development of the flora every year since. It is one of the many smaller fields on the farm that are being progressively reverted to benefit wildlife. Larger fields are being retained in arable cultivation as habitat for stone curlews and other farmland birds.

The monitoring consists of recording all the plants in twenty 1 x 1 metre quadrats distributed in an upside down 'W' formation, starting in the bottom south-west corner near what is now the car park, to ensure good coverage of the field. The frequency of occurrence of each species can then be calculated. Records of other species seen, but not found in the quadrats are also made. On this occasion, Anne had marked the

**annual  
monitoring of  
an arable  
reversion  
field**

**a closed  
sward that is  
full of  
wildflowers,  
very  
colourful and  
alive with  
bees and  
other insects**

Examining a quadrat - photo: Anne



approximate positions of the twenty quadrats with numbered canes in advance, to ensure smooth running of the process. Eight members in total divided into two groups of two and one of three, with Anne moving between the groups to assist as necessary. Finding and identifying every plant in a quadrat concentrates the mind and helps to hone identification skills!

The biggest change in the flora occurred between the first and second years after sowing. In 2007, the sward was open, with at least 10% and up to 60% of bare ground remaining in quadrats. Arable weeds such as Barren Brome (*Anisantha sterilis*), Cleavers (*Galium aparine*) and Prickly Sow-thistle (*Sonchus asper*) were widespread and 'desirable' species were relatively few and far between. Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) was, however, establishing well and found in eleven of the twenty quadrats and by the following year, this had increased to nineteen. By 2008, the proportion of bare ground was down to between 2% and 15%, many arable weeds had disappeared and plants such as Quaking Grass (*Briza media*) were beginning to appear. Subsequent management by topping, spot treatment of undesirable species and latterly by introduction of grazing, has now led to the establishment of a closed sward that is full of wildflowers, very colourful and alive with bees and other insects, a remarkable transformation in only five years. The number and frequency of chalk grassland species is gradually increasing and every visit seems to yield new finds. This year, several plants of *Genista tinctoria* (Dyer's Greenweed) were seen, although not alas in our quadrats. Patrick Cashman, the Reserve Manager, tells me that Clustered Bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*) has flowered well since our visit, although again, we did not pick this up. The field was due to be brush-harvested recently and



Crown Vetch

then grazed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's Dexter cattle.

Although the twenty quadrats usually take the three stalwarts Pat, Sue and Anne the best part of a day, with three teams working hard, we finished at lunch time and after lunch using the strategically placed picnic bench in the car park, we crossed the road and went south-west along the disused railway line that also forms part of the reserve. Here we saw the flourishing population of Crown Vetch (*Securigera varia*) and saw evidence of attempts to eradicate the invasive Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). Further on, drastic scrub clearance in the railway cutting is helping to maintain the small population of junipers on the very steep slopes. Cages from the Plantlife Juniper Project, intended to assist regeneration, have been placed on the slopes, but we could see no baby junipers as yet.

The railway line took us past the Loop, another reversion field that WBS members are monitoring. This seems to have benefited from the early dry weather, as the grasses are much less vigorous this year. On this occasion however, rain was threatening and soon afterwards we retreated along the line to our cars.

Thanks to all who took part in recording; your efforts are much appreciated.

Anne Appleyard

Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2011

## Braydon Forest Verge

It was a day of drenching rain, and in the far corner of the county so only three WBS members joined Stephen Davies the verge monitor and Jane Cole from Mousel

We aimed to survey this small verge and produce an updated list of plant species.

The verge is a triangular patch at a crossroads and was very soggy underfoot, as well as from the rain. Stephen said this was partly due to a long-standing leak from a pipe and it would be interesting to see whether and how the site changed now the leak had been fixed. Indeed it would. At our visit the site had much of three species of Rush, *Juncus conglomeratus*, *J. effusus* and *J. inflexus* (Compact, Soft, Hard) and there was a great deal of *Equisetum arvense* Field Horsetail. In those circumstances it was surprising what had survived and could spread in drier conditions; we found 60 species, mostly the usual suspects for an unimproved neutral meadow. We thought the greater bindweed was the less common *Calystegia sylvatica* but later had doubts. Stephen went back to photograph it and confirmed that it was *Calystegia sylvatica*.

Why should one feel virtuous doing a pleasant task merely because it is raining? But we did, and it **was** awfully wet.

Rosemary Duckett



Purples, yellows and white covering the meadow

Saturday 16 July 2011

## Cloatley Meadows

Leader: Paul Darby

After feeding and drying ourselves, the sun came out and the world looked much better. The wet weather had thinned us out to just three visitors to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's reserve. This was a shame, because the meadows were giving a wonderful display of purples (Knapweed and Betony), yellows (Lady's Bedstraw and Hawkbits) and white (Meadowsweet and Marsh Bedstraw). There was a beautiful white-rayed variation of Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*.

We dutifully assembled a list of 108 species, which included Brown, Glaucous, Hairy and False Fox sedges (*Carex disticha*, *flacca*, *hirta*, *otrubae*), Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, Meadow Barley *Hordeum secalinum*, Lesser Hawkbit *Leontodon saxatilis*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, Pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*.



White-rayed variety of knapweed

There were plenty of grasshoppers. A handsome one that stopped and posed for us looked like Roesel's Bush-cricket *Metrioptera roselii* on the FSC "Guide to British grasshoppers".

Richard Aisbitt



Roesel's Bush-cricket?

Wednesday 20 July 2011

## Spye Park

Leader: Lesley Wallington

What a delight Spye Park is, offering such an amazing range of habitats from arable fields to woodland, grasslands, lakes and heathland. The term 'heath' also tells us something of the soil types - sands with underlying clay - and it is at the junction of these two that some of the more rare plants are found.

Fourteen of us joined the estate manager, Pam Lewis, to look at some arable reversion plots for the first part of our visit. Pam explained that the new (2005) owners of the estate wanted to create green and pleasant pastures from an area that had been arable for many years. Several attempts had been made and on each occasion the results were surprising but not always pleasing. Weed species, especially those poisonous to horses, had to be avoided since haymaking and grazing were planned as future uses for the plots. After leaving the area fallow for a while some spraying had been undertaken (for weed control) and in 2010 seed was sown. Two suppliers were used and the mixes augmented with seed from local sources, including some annual species.

Pam described some of the phases seen in recent months: 'pink with Stork's-bill *Erodium cicutarium*', 'white with Shepherd's Purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*' and, more

**an amazing range of habitats from arable fields to woodland, grasslands, lakes and heathland**

**we did find six species listed in the Wiltshire Rare Plant Register**



A huge, ancient oak (David for scale)

recently, 'yellow with Smooth Hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris*'. We found all of these species and many more. Several were lovely cornfield plants that we seldom see today; Long-headed Poppies, Cornflowers, Corn Marigold, and Corncockle (*Papaver dubium*, *Centaurea cyanus*, *Chrysanthemum segetum* and *Agrostemma githago*). These, of course, will disappear as the sward develops and disturbance is minimal. Several plants caught our attention because of their doubtful provenance; in particular the Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* was probably var. *sativus*, which is often found in wild-flower mixes and conspicuous by its upright habit. A deep red poppy with wonderfully crinkled petals was much admired but was considered to be *P. dubium* of dubious origins.

Pam had also brought along some examples of weeds that she had been removing from garden borders over the past few days. Weasel's-snout *Misopates orontium* and Pale Toadflax *Linaria repens* were viewed with great relish and provided the stimulus to go forth and hunt, despite quite heavy rain. On various bits of untended (waste?) ground and on the edge of an arable plot we found Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, Fig-leaved Goosefoot *Chenopodium ficifolium*, Annual Nettle *Urtica urens* and Small-flowered Crane's-bill *Geranium pusillum* amongst many other more common species.

Our route then took us into woodland and, along the edge of a wet, slippery track we saw Brookweed *Samolus valerandi* and Bristle Club-rush *Isolepis setacea*. Although much of the woodland had been planted in recent times a few very old trees remained, in particular a wonderful old oak. Nearby was a rotting trunk of considerable dimensions which Dave Green said had been blown over some twenty or more years ago. Amazingly, it was still alive. Our path then took us past two lakes

which had been established just two years ago and up past an ancient pine *Pinus sylvestris* believed to be over 300 years old. Finally we reached the heathlands where bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Ling *Calluna vulgaris* were abundant. In the short turf we were able to find Sand Spurrey *Spergularia rubra*, Trailing St John's Wort *Hypericum humifusum*, Parsley Piert *Aphanes australis* and more Birdsfoot.

These are just a few of the highlights of a day packed with good finds. It is interesting to compare the records from recent years with those documented by Donald Grose who, in 1953, was asked to survey the estate by the Nature Conservancy (now Natural England). At that time he described parts of the estate, in particular the stream-valleys, as unique in Wiltshire and large parts of adjoining counties because they had apparently suffered no major disturbance for centuries. Consider how much greater their significance is today, following half a century of intensive management of much of our county. Quite a few of the plants which were regarded as rare in North Wilts by Grose were found on this visit and it is quite probable that several more could have been located with greater searching. Quite amazingly, we did find six species listed in the Wiltshire Rare Plant Register growing naturally plus a further two that had been planted. We must pay tribute to the way in which the Spicer Family (the previous owners) tended the estate and trust that the current owners will be equally good custodians.

Our thanks to Gigs Enthoven for allowing us access, to Pam Lewis for telling us about her arable reversion experiments, to Lesley Wallington for organising our visit and to Dave Green for his knowledge and inspirational leadership. I felt sure that he would not be able to resist a visit to this favoured haunt of his!

Pat Woodruffe

Saturday, 6th August 2011

## Rushall Organic Farm

Leader: Tim Kaye



In the wheat field - Spelt



Spelt Wheat (?) - detail

Seventeen members & friends started out in rather unpromising weather on this farm of over 1,500 acres, which is managed organically, and mostly situated on the Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk. The Wookey family have owned the land since 1945, with organic conversion starting in 1970, a rare thing in those days. With the majority of the farm being arable, we were, naturally, hoping to find some of the more uncommon plants associated with this habitat. We were not disappointed, although initially it took some time.

We were sidetracked by a rather interesting looking type of wheat which none of us could identify... (Was it Spelt? – yes,

Summer 2011

it matches pictures on the internet – Ed.).

Dwarf spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*) and Venus's Looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*) were noted, and as the weather warmed up, the first specimen of Red Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia* (Red List - Critically Endangered; BAP - Priority Species) was seen, the first of several nationally scarce plants. Sharon pointed out two grasses also particularly associated with this habitat- Onion couch (*Arrhenatherum elatius* ssp. *bulbosum*) and Black bent (*Agrostis gigantea*). As lunchtime approached and the sun came out

Wall butterflies (*Lasiomata megera*) were seen on the field margins and headlands, another indication of the wildlife richness of this farm which has been completely organic since 1985.

Our thanks go to Tim Kaye for arranging this visit.

Paul Darby



Red Hemp-nettle



False Oat-grass roots



River Wye from Symonds Yat

August 12<sup>th</sup> 2011

## Symonds Yat

Leaders: Mark and Clare Kitchen

It was a long way, but well worth the effort. Eleven of us met at the car park, including young Robert, and we set off for a walk that took us down the steep-sided cliff, along the banks of the River Wye and finally back up along a more gentle route.

Firstly a little about the geology, which might help to explain some of the interesting associations of plants that were found. Symonds Yat is an impressive promontory cliff around which the Wye makes an enormous loop. The rocks are Carboniferous era, limestone on top and sandstone underneath, producing a soil alkaline on the cliff-tops but more acid in leached hollows and lower down where the sandstone outcrops underlie the soil. These patches with different soil characteristics were quite small-scale, giving local variation in the flora.

**Roots of "normal" False Oat-grass (left) compared with Onion Couch (right): *Arrhenatherum elatius* subsp. *Bulbosum*, which spreads by its corm-like swellings**

Continued ...



Mountain Melick



Pat W

Our first stop was to see Wild Service Trees *Sorbus torminalis*, of which there were many, together with Whitebeam, *Sorbus aria* and their hybrid *S. x tomentella*. This is an area where Tim Rich from the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff is conducting research into this group. A photograph of the three leaves will show the intermediate nature of the hybrid. A tip from Mark: any *Sorbus* leaf with less than eleven pairs of veins could be 'interesting' and later on the walk we were shown *S. porrigentiformis* with 7-10 pairs. Quite a name, so perhaps Grey-leaved Whitebeam is more easily remembered.

Further down the cliff we were surprised to find several plants familiar to us from chalk grasslands; Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, Marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and even Dwarf Sedge *Carex humilis*. Close by was Common Cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* a species which we associate with heathlands. Discussion revealed that there are two subspecies of *Melampyrum*, one



Cow-wheat, subsp. *commutatum*

**Sorbus leaves: *aria* (L), *torminalis* (R) and *x tomentella* (middle)**

**Sorbus, Cow-wheat, Limestone Fern, wood-rushes, sedges, Mountain Melick - plenty of interest**

which favours acid conditions and another, which is found on calcareous soils in S England and SE Wales extending to Worcestershire. The plants we found first had narrow leaves and were *M. pratense* ssp. *pratense*, growing on acid soils. At the end of the day some of us spotted another population at the top of the cliff and Mark realised that these had much broader leaves and were indeed the other subspecies – *commutatum*.

As we meandered along the cliff we passed several Small-leaved Limes *Tilia cordata*, Bloody Cranesbill *Geranium sanguineum* and several plants of Soft-leaved Sedge *Carex montana*. The latter had light green leaves, quite unlike most sedges, and the unusual habit of maintaining last year's leaves as a dead thatch around its base. Our ID skills were put to the test with the next plant, a rare grass. It was hard to spot, let alone identify but Anne managed it! It was Mountain Melick *Melica nutans*, a plant which some of us saw in Yorkshire in 2010. Again the leaves were a yellow-green colour and reminiscent of *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, with which it was growing. The spikes however could not be confused.



Limestone Fern

At the bottom of the cliff we came across a group of Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, some Great Wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* and a small amount of Fingered Sedge *Carex digitata*, unfortunately with only the smallest amount of fertile material left to see. Walking along the paths near the river we found large quantities of

Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula* and, growing with it, Thin-spiked Wood Sedge *Carex strigosa*. The latter has quite broad leaves and so it was thought to be young plants of Pendulous Sedge until the characteristic flowering shoots were found. Another 'good find' in this area was Southern Wood-rush *Luzula forsteri* which looks rather like Hairy Wood-rush *Luzula pilosa* until you get your eye in. *L. forsteri* is noted because the inflorescence remains one sided, even in fruit and the leaves are a much darker green than those of its close relative. If this was not enough, several of us made acquaintance with yet another new plant Narrow-leaved Bitter-cress *Cardamine impatiens*. There was in fact discussion as to whether this might be the same species as Dave had shown us way back in 2003 in The Wye Valley. The value of our write-ups is now clear for all to see – I can confirm that Lesley wrote about just that plant at Black Cliff lower down the valley nearer to Chepstow.

Finally as the afternoon wore on we began our climb back up the cliff. The Nettle-leaved Bellflowers *Campanula trachelium* were a delight but the search was on for Limestone Fern *Gymnocarpium robertianum*. Although the quantity present has decreased it was good to see that spore cases had formed on the undersides of some leaves. Mark did however comment at it was not growing in ideal habitat and that elsewhere in the county there was a site where it was abundant.

Tired out by the strenuous terrain, but happily so, once we regained the top we sustained ourselves with tea and cake at the café. Mark and Clare did a great job and showed us a wonderful range of interesting plants. We must truly thank them for their efforts and for giving us such a lovely day.

*Sue Fitzpatrick and Pat Woodruffe*



Wednesday 7 September  
2011

# Great High Croft and Hang Wood, East Knogle

Leader: David Pickering



A select group of six met at The Windmill on the hill above East Knogle. David Pickering, our leader for the day, has lived in the area for over 30 years and explained a little about the geology of the area. This hill represents the uplift side of the famous Mere fault, which raised the Kimmeridge clay and upper greensand by 185 m. It is unusual therefore to be on so high an upper greensand hill. In fact it is about the same height as the chalk hill to the north on the other side of the fault line. Chalk of course normally overlies upper greensand by hundreds of feet.

Beneath our feet was an assemblage of plants that is very unusual in Wiltshire. There was Ling *Calluna vulgaris*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* and Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*. The one that caused the most discussion was a low, flowering gorse. We were at a position where Western Gorse *U. gallii* meets Dwarf Gorse *U. minor*, so it became necessary to consult the floras. Fortunately several

characteristics, in particular the length of the calyx and the size of the bracteoles, provided a pretty clear-cut answer – *Ulex gallii*. Clearly the soil was acidic here but some of us were perplexed about the lush grass growing in certain parts. The answer seems to lie in the practice of having bonfire beacons on this spot, the mineral ash providing additional nutrients.

From this high point we meandered into woodland known as Great High Croft and made our way steadily downhill into the Kimmeridge clay. The grandeur of some old trees, sycamore, beech, oak and Scots Pine in particular, struck us immediately. Particularly large specimens were growing on an old boundary bank and they had clearly seen many, many years pass. Just one unfortunate finding – a flourishing population of Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* growing where the vegetation had been cut under electricity wires. As we dropped in height so the number of ferns increased as well as the ever-present Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula*. *Polypodium interjectum* was growing as an epiphyte on a magnificent oak while Male Fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and Broad Buckler *D. dilatata* were common at ground level. After a little searching we were also able to find a few specimens of Narrow Buckler Fern, *D. carthusiana* with its pale scales and relatively fragile appearance. This area also produced some splendid examples of Soft Shield Fern *Polystichum setiferum* with its characteristic ‘thumb’ on each pinnule. Later on the walk we saw also Hard Shield Fern *P. aculeatum* and could spot from a distance the different texture of this plant. As we came to the bottom of the valley we saw some Hart’s Tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium* and also Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* growing along the banks of the stream.



**Greensand,  
chalk,  
ancient  
woodland,  
meadows,  
steep hills,  
and tea and  
cake...**

We left the woodland to walk through several small fields, each bounded by hedges with trees of varying sizes, which were such a contrast to the frequently open landscapes of Wiltshire. In one such field we found a seed-head of Corky-fruited Water Dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* growing on a damp slope. We ate lunch in an open space which was part of a Woodland Trust Reserve and then meandered back through Hang Wood. Having investigated most of the ferns, we turned out attention to some early fungi, in particular an interesting *Clavulinopsis* – possibly *C. cineriodes*. There were also some good examples of Stinkhorn fungi *Phallus impudicus*, advertising their presence in the usual way, and numerous puffballs too. Our final leg of the journey was a walk up Martha’s Lane, bounded by old Maple trees. David suggested that this lane might date back as far as Saxon times. We certainly passed some wonderful old trees as we came back into East Knogle along a narrow road and also a hedge containing the native *Berberis*. Our visit to this pretty, unspoilt village felt like a journey back in time, and the cup of tea and chocolate cake that awaited us at Hill Cottage was a wonderful end to a lovely day. We certainly must thank David, our leader, and John for making us so welcome.

Pat Woodruffe



*Clavulinopsis cineriodes?*

# The Gower - Residential Visit - 7th to 11th July

Dave Green led the first WBS residential field trip back in 1999. This was to the Gower and Dave led a repeat visit for us twelve years later. With more participants, Anne Appleyard found us accommodation at the University of Swansea, amongst huge numbers of foreign students (maybe) learning English and certainly having a good time. Dave knows the Gower well and took us to gorgeous places. But for a damp first morning, the weather was sunny. We saw lots of less familiar plants on the soggy acid bits that we don't get much in Wiltshire, as well as meeting some old friends on the limestone. Nobody got lost for long and, thanks to Anne and Dave, we had a great time.



Three Cliffs Bay from West Cliff

Thursday 7 July 2011

## West Cliff

We met at West Cliff for our first taste of the delights of Gower. On the way here we had all experienced extremely heavy showers, but the sun shone on our botanising.

Just below the car park we saw the Seaside Thistle (Slender Thistle, *Carduus tenuiflorus*) and were soon able to compare it with the Musk or Nodding Thistle (*Carduus nutans*) we also saw Hawkweed Oxtongue (*Picris hieracioides*). When we were on the shorter grass on the cliffs we not only had stunning views of the coast we also had some more exciting plants. We found Hoary Rockrose (*Helianthemum oelandicum*) as well as the Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*). After a search we found Rough Clover (*Trifolium Scabrum*). We also found century and started the debate about the differences between Common Century

**Our first afternoon - a good set of finds on the dry cliff edge**

(*Centaurea erythraea*) and Seaside Century (*Centaurea littorale*) which was continued at other venues and in the evenings.

Among the grasses we found were Crested Hair Grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) Early Hair Grass (*Aria praecox*) and Silver Hair Grass (*Aria caryophyllea*).

This was a brief taste of the treats to come on our visit to Gower, both the weather, the scenery and the botany were superb.

Sonia Heywood

Friday July 8<sup>th</sup> 2011

## Oxwich National Nature Reserve

Friday started very wet, with heavy rain overnight, which woke many of us staying at Swansea University. The clouds were very low as we drove to Oxwich and everyone put waterproofs on at the car park.



Sea Sandwort - Honkenya

Oxwich Bay is a SSSI and National Nature Reserve which and comprises a sandy shore, calcareous dunes, dune slacks and both fresh water and salt water marshes so we were all expecting to see many goodies.

Our first stop was the toilet block but not for Mother Nature's call but Mother Nature's plants. The first stooping of the day was for Compact Brome (*Bromus madritensis*) growing in shingle around the building. At the dune bank adjacent many of us stopped to admire Sea Stock (*Matthiola sinuata*) along with the first of many Bloody Cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*).

Dave Green led us about one kilometre along the beach where we caught up with Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*), and Sea Spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*). We looked, but couldn't find any

Portland Spurge (*E. Portlandica*) despite its being recorded here.

The weather had now improved as a sunny brighter system moved in, but it was good to get out of the wind and into a large dune slack particularly for Malcolm whose 100m dash along the water's edge to retrieve a wayward hat was seen amusingly by just a few (Sorry Malcolm!)

At the point where we cut into the dunes some fabulous Marsh Helleborines (*Epipactis palustris*) greeted us and in the dunes themselves we saw varied Evening Primroses (*Oenothera*) including one concluded as Small-flowered EP (*Oenothera cambrica*). We also found that the sand to be full of Common Rest Harrow (*Ononis repens*).

A sunken and damp area had an abundance of interesting flora not least a whole bank of Round-leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*) which was simply stunning. The saprophytic Yellow Birds Nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*) was found by Rosemary<sup>1</sup> in amongst Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) from which we assumed it was gaining its fill away from its usual Beech. Marsh Helleborine was found to be quite numerous throughout as was Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*). Variegated Horsetail (*Equisetum variegatum*) was discovered in a damp spot but I

<sup>1</sup> Since our trip Dave Green has sent some of our records to the Glamorgan Recorder. The Yellow Birds Nest plants were the first ones recorded since the 1970's. Well done to Rosemary and the Wiltshire Botanical Society!



Sea Lavender



don't think either of us would have noticed it! There was also an active insect population and we were all drawn to a Puss Moth caterpillar on a low willow and a Great Green Bush Cricket on Paul's coat!

Further on, Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acer*) with flowers just about finished on most plants crossed the track and up to where we entered a grazed area of the dune. This site occasionally floods in the winter and this is where we were able to 'try out' the effective spikes of Sharp Rush (*Juncus acutus*) Ouch! A very lucky and untrodden Autumn Gentian (*Gentianella amarella*) was flowering at the edge of the path.

Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), and Yellow Wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), were seen here along with yet more Marsh Helleborines.

Our walk took us through a marshy area and through young woodland with much Common Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*). Here we spotted Wild Madder (*Rubia peregrina*). The track opened out at a viewpoint to the east towards Three Cliffs Bay where we felt confident at last in removing our waterproofs and enjoying our lunches.



Sea Bindweed

Yellow Bird's Nest



Sea Stock



Sea Holly



Marsh Helleborine

Dave then lead us into the salt marsh where we saw some Marsh Mallow plants (*Althaea officinalis*) which were not yet in flower, Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*), Lesser Centaury (*C. pulchellum*), and masses of Sea Lavender (*Limonium vulgare*). We crossed the Nicholaston Pill via a modern bridge and spent some time investigating the young mobile dune system. Almost straight away we were drawn to Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*) and it was amazing how many people when told that it was prickly just had to try it out; ourselves included! Ouch again! Here we also identified Halberd leaved Orache (*Atriplex hastata*) and came across Sheep's Bit (*Jasione montana*) and Sea Bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*)

Our return walk was back along the beach for a couple of kilometres, into a bracing, but thankfully mild wind. Most then enjoyed a cup of tea and some indulged in cake or ice cream at a local café and we thanked Dave for a very interesting day.

Martin Buckland and Alison Robinson



David and the ponies

Saturday 9 July 2011, morning

## Broad Pool

Broad Pool is a shallow pool of natural origins that has been in existence since 1645, though it was modified in the eighteenth century by the removal of vegetation and sediment. It has been known to dry out only three times in the last hundred and eighty years - 1897, 1920 and 1984. The site is alongside a straight road across the Gower moorland, beneath Cefn Bryn, and is managed by Glamorgan Wildlife Trust.



Genista anglica pods

As we arrived, Dave Green produced a sample of Whorled Caraway *Carum verticillatum* that he had brought with him as a challenge for us.

We enjoyed watching small groups of ponies with their foals until we gathered for an introduction to the site.

The area is sandstone ridge, acid over a limestone plateau, promising a variety of plant life. Streams disappear down holes here, and Sharon warned us of areas of *Sphagnum* moss, telling us that there are five species here - identification not for the faint-hearted....

**A sandstone ridge, acid over a limestone plateau, promising a variety of plant life.**

**Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* identified as such partly because we were west of Bournemouth**

As with the other Gower sites, there was atmosphere and diversity.....the expected wet habitat lovers such as Common Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, and a variety of rushes and sedges.....acid lovers such as Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*.



Bog Asphodel

Over the pool a lone swift scooped insects from the surface.



Western Gorse

Plants in the pond include the unusual Alternate-leaved Water-milfoil *Myriophyllum alterniflorum*, Fringed Water-lily which was introduced in 1952, and *Potamogeton* species as well as the invasive *Crassula helmsii*.

Martin told us about the birdlife that was both seen and/or heard. These included Reed Bunting, Meadow Pipit, Snipe,



Mountain Fern - *Oreopteris limbosperma*

Heron, and, as the sun came out, a skylark rose in song.

There were further low-lying pools. As we crossed the site we found Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* identified as such partly because we were west of Bournemouth!

We enjoyed the smell as we crushed Bog-myrtle leaves, and discussion over a Milkwort led to identification as Heath Milkwort, the bottom leaves being opposite each other rather than alternate as in other species. Other heath species included Heath Rush *Juncus squarrosus* and Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*.

*Juncus bufonius* (Toad Rush) was found with the seeds germinating on the plant (proliferating).

Non-botanical species, apart from the birds, included Damselflies, Dragonflies, small frogs and toads, Silver-Y and Straw Dot moths, Meadow Brown butterfly, a Water Scorpion and the unfolding drama of a Funnel-web spider trapping a grasshopper!

As we straggled back to the cars, ready for lunch, Marjorie finished the morning by finding Whorled Caraway growing in the verge!

Jane Brown



Golden Samphire

At last we found the elusive, rare (and pretty) Spiked Speedwell



Ploughman's Spikenard

Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July, afternoon

## Port Eynon

We had a comfortable picnic in the dunes with some of Port Eynon's showy garden escapes; Red Valerian, Evening Primrose, a garden Hypericum and Japanese Knotweed.

Soon after setting out we came to some Musk Stork's-bill *Erodium moschatum* before climbing the promontory. At a small quarry in the hillside there was Hairy Rock-cress *Arabis*



Spiked Speedwell



Smith's Pepperwort



Sea Plantain

*hirsuta*, Ploughman's Spikenard *Inula conyza* and Sea Stork's-bill *Erodium maritimum* so with *E. cicutarium* that was three *Erodia* in a short time.

At the top there were some rather scrabby little plants of Wild Clary *Salvia verbenaca* and some dwarfed Slender Thistle *Carduus tenuiflorus*, neither much seen in Wiltshire and so a treat. Otherwise the sward was so close-cropped and miniaturised that hands-and-knees would not do, we had to lie down. The basal rosettes of Buck's-horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus* were only 1 cm across with no higher growth possible from the nibbling of rabbits.

Our diligent finger-tip searching was rewarded with Bird's-foot Clover *Trifolium ornithopodioides* in full but minuscule flower and other tiny things.

We bounced along the top of the cliffs then down the path to the shore, noting Sea Wormwood *Artemisia maritima* on the way. Between the rocks above the tide line there was a splendid show of Golden Samphire *Inula crithmoides* in full flower, also Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum* not yet in flower and Buck's-horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus* now leafy, tall, and flowering, away from the rabbits. [Samphire = St. Pierre; the plants are not related]

We went round the beach and scrambled up the next headland in pursuit of Spiked Speedwell *Veronica spicata* – satisfactorily found. A surprise was Smith's Pepperwort *Lepidium heterophyllum* with its persistent styles much longer than we had realised when hunting for it in Wiltshire.

And so back to the village and ice creams. It had been a glorious afternoon – botanists luck again – with sailing clouds and vast blue views.

Rosemary Duckett



Sunday 10 July 2011,  
morning

## Whiteford Burrows NNR



Bog Pimpernel

This place is part of a larger protected area covering a range of habitats of national importance. We parked at Llanmadoc and as usual tripped over a car park rarity, Horse Mint (*Mentha longifolia*)<sup>1</sup>. We descended through deep lanes and even after huge breakfasts some of us managed a few Dewberries along the path. We emerged alongside a carboniferous limestone cliff and what looked like a raised beach. Below the path, a mature dune slack viewed from above looked like a Persian carpet, with both Bugloss and Viper's Bugloss (*Anchusa* and *Echium*), Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*), Thyme,



Strawberry Clover

<sup>1</sup> A problem here: Stace 3 (p631) says "M. longifolia ... from Europe, has often been mis-determined for hairy plants of *M. spicata* or *M. x villosanervata*, but does not occur in BI ..."



Yellow Bartsia



Marsh Mallow

**The usual succession was evident, from new dunes just bound with Sea Couch and Marram Grass through to mature scrubby woodland on old grey dunes**

Lady's Bedstraw, Bloody Cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*) and many other old friends.

The limestone cliffs supported a stunning calcicole flora, and with their tilted strata looked like a well-tended rock garden. Plants included the rare Lesser Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum minus*) and Knotted Pearlwort (*Sagina nodosa*).

Having now reached Whiteford Burrows proper, a magnificent apparently mature

dune system, Dave Green told us that it had developed in only thirty years. The usual succession was evident, from new dunes just bound with Sea Couch and Marram Grass through to mature scrubby woodland on old grey dunes. Sheep grazing, rabbit grazing and man cutting down any bigger trees kept this climax vegetation in check. A fine turf resulted in places, and even only thirty years of leaching had removed salt and shell calcium carbonate to produce an acid soil.

Dwarf Willow (*Salix repens*) and Burnet Rose (*Rosa spinosissima*) were widespread, and we became better at rush identification with Sharp Rush (*Juncus acutus*) with its lethal pointed leaves, Sea Rush (*J. maritimus*) and Blunt-flowered Rush (*J. subnodulosus*). Rarities included Yellow Bartsia (*Parentucellia viscosa*), Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*), Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*),

Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*) and Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritimum*).

We found sheets of the spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis* in the wetter dune slacks, and the handsome bulrush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*. The writer once found this in a dewpond on Tan Hill in Wiltshire to where it was probably brought by sheep coming to the ancient sheep fair once held there.

Nice odds and ends included Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), Common Yellow-



sedge (*Carex demissa*) and Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus<sup>2</sup> maritimus*).

Sitting down for a rest, we found Hard Grass (*Parapholis strigosa*) and as someone said, "that is when you find rarities". We argued, as on every day so far, about which Centaury (not century!) we were sitting near. Lunch was calling and our pace quickened, only slowing down to admire absolute sheets of *Sagina nodosa*, and the uncommon Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) with its strawberry-like fruit clusters. A brilliant morning!

David Pickering

Whiteford Burrows is at grid reference SS440935

<sup>2</sup> Changed from *Scirpus*

Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2011

## Kenfig National Nature Reserve

On Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2011, those of us not having to dash home, made a morning visit to Kenfig N.N.R. We soon got to work in the Car Park! Lovely patches of Hare's-foot Clover, *Trifolium arvense*, and Kidney Vetch – *Anthyllis vulneraria* and lots of other tiny treasures which lack of time made us overlook. Red Clovers, Thyme, Restharrow and Ragwort brightened our walk towards the sea. We found a few patches of White Stork's-bill *Erodium cicutarium* and lots of Orchids in various stages of Hybridisation between Southern Marsh and Common Spotted, all very lovely. We did find one, seemingly pure Southern Marsh, *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* which made a good subject for a photo stop. Then great golden patches of Yellow Loosestrife, *Lysimachia vulgaris*, so much more beautiful than the garden one. Also, a large shining area of Common Sedge, *Carex nigra* waving to and fro in the breeze, looking quite spectacular in the sunshine. Adder's-tongue – *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, Slender Rush – *Juncus tenuis*, Fragrant Orchid – *Gymnadenia conopsea*. A lot of the plants we had seen on the Gower – Burnet Rose, Round-leaved Wintergreen, Marsh Helleborine. We saw a few Small Blue Butterflies. The



Hare's-foot Clover

Warden assured us that the Fen Orchid – *Liparis loeselii* was well over. He didn't know that our secret weapon, Heather, would fine quite a decent plant and that our lunch was taken sitting on a delightful bank overlooking the star find of the day! A perfect end to a perfect Holiday. Anne had done it again, for which, much thanks.

Marjorie Waters

**Hare's-foot Clover and Kidney Vetch in the car park**



Yellow Loosestrife



Southern Marsh Orchid

Summer 2011



Perennial Sow-thistle

Wiltshire Botanical Society



Meadow Thistle

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# Wiltshire Botanical Society Committee

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Tim Kaye	Treasurer and Membership	07980 863 577	timdankaye@hotmail.com
Pat Woodruffe	Meetings Secretary	01794 884436	pmw.bentley@waitrose.com

## Winter Meetings

- Sun 16 October 2011 River Avon and K&A Canal, pub lunch - Tom and Jean Smith,
- Sun 20 November 2011 Cholderton Estate, organic farmland, lunch, discussion on 'farming and wildlife' - Henry Edmunds
- Sat 3 December 2011 Crown Centre, Devizes, Protected Road Verges - Fiona Elphick, County Ecologist
- Sat 14 January 2012 Urchfont Village Hall, Atlas Recording Workshop - Sharon Pilkington. A chance to learn more about the 10 year recording initiative from BSBI
- Sat 25 February 2012 Snowdrops, Erlestoke Woods, pub lunch - Rosemary Duckett and Sonia Heywood
- Sat 3 March 2012 AGM St Andrew's Church Hall, Devizes, presentation 'Gower Revisited'
- Sat 17 March 2012 Caen Hill locks, pub lunch, talk by Malcolm Storey - Jane Brown
- June 17 - 19 inclusive Residential visit to The Brecklands, Norfolk - Anne Appleyard, organiser

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

## Future meetings

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

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

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

## From the Chairman

### Committee Members

**Jack Oliver** was secretary to the society from its beginning in 1992 until 1996, when Jean Wall took over. He continued on the committee thereafter, but has now decided that it is time to become a normal WBS member. We will miss his good sense, botanical expertise, all the interesting specimens and the puzzling problems he brought to our meetings. Thank you Jack.

We thank **Tim Kaye** for being an admirable **treasurer** who has also looked after our membership list and gently but firmly chased us for subscriptions. However, he has been in post for three years and has decided that he will give up the job after the AGM in March 2012. Of course we will be looking for a new treasurer. Any offers to do this essential task for the society will be hugely welcome.

### Website

Tim is not leaving the committee, but is planning an exciting new website to act as a one-stop shop to serve existing members and to recruit new ones. We hope for great things.

Tim has already set up a Facebook page. To see it, you need to sign on to Facebook (register first if you haven't already). Then search for Wiltshire Botanical Society.

### Subscriptions

Our annual subscription has been £10 since 2004, but is no longer covering our costs. We will propose an increase to £15 at the Annual General Meeting in March. Of course, life members are exempt from increases, but would be welcome to make an extra contribution.

Are there ways for us to economise? One way is to have the newsletter by email or internet download rather than getting a printed and copy by post. Would you be happy with this? Let us know. Do make other suggestions.

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

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