

Weeting Heath Field Meeting – May 2020

The meeting on April 10th last year was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this was its replacement, the very first day on which we were allowed to gather together outside in groups of up to thirty people. Thirteen of us met up, plus our leader Stephen Clarkson, and the ebullient warden, James Symonds; sadly no sunshine but very fortunately no rain. Such is the fame of the three tiny Veronicas – Fingered Speedwell *Veronica triphyllos*, Breckland Speedwell *V. praecox* and Spring Speedwell *V. verna* – that some heroes came from as far as away as Warwickshire, Yorkshire, Lincoln and South London.

After introductions we set off past a nice display of Field Mouse-ear *Cerastium arvense* to an arable field which was chosen fifty years ago by Norfolk Naturalists' Society, with the support of a friendly farmer, as a safe site on which to protect rare Breckland arable species, especially the three Speedwells. As we entered the field we saw a beautiful Prickly Poppy *Roemeria argemone* and then it was a hands and knees or a low-bending job.

James thought that we were a bit late for the Fingered Speedwell but that there would be lots of Spring Speedwell but, in fact, we found several Fingered and Breckland Speedwells, but the Spring Speedwell flowers were the hardest to spot. Of the three the Fingered was the easiest to spot being erect and taller, all things being relative! In all cases there were a great many plants. Annual Knawel *Scleranthus annuus* ssp. *annuus* was another tiny treasure for the sharp-eyed and we enjoyed photographing a splendid patch of Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*.

We then moved from this special arable field, which was sown with Rye, to a large open heath and almost immediately saw a beautiful patch of Purple Milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus* in full bloom, a joy for those missing colour. Then on to a low bank for two very small calcareous-loving sedges the Rare Spring-sedge *Carex ericetorum* (which as its name suggests is very rare) and the more frequent Spring-sedge *C. caryophyllea*. By this time we older botanists were a bit weary and headed back to our dog and our lunch, leaving the rest to botanise further. A very fruitful morning enjoyed particularly thanks to our charming and very hard-working warden, James. An all-round naturalist, he is a particularly keen lepidopterist with an on-site moth list of over 1100 species.

After lunch Stephen had a tempting add-on expedition to a site in nearby Mildenhall for the very rare Field Wormwood *Artemisia campestris* ssp. *campestris*. Currently only in leaf but masses of it on a big common near St John's Close. Flowering at the end of August it will be very easily found. In splendid colour at the moment were many clumps of Cypress Spurge *Euphorbia cyparissias*. So ended a happy, friendly and productive day. Our first WFS meeting but certainly not our last. Thank you Stephen.

BEN and TESSA FISHER