

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

During the last few months climate change seems to have dominated my schedule. This is hardly surprising given the serious nature of it and the slowness of political action about it. I am heartened that a 16 year old Swedish schoolgirl can alert the whole world to it under the title "Extinction Rebellion" because it is all about the extinction of biological species including the wild flowers that we love so much. In August I gave a lecture on the biological evidences for climate change to the Colombian Academy of Sciences in Bogotá. During the last month my travels have taken me to two very different places, Puerto Rico in the tropics and Norway on holiday to see the Northern Lights, but in both climate change has dominated the scene. I took part in a conference about climate change in Puerto Rico where I was the keynote speaker. It was encouraging to see 300 people assembled to hear about climate change in a state that has recently suffered two serious hurricanes. More strong hurricanes is one of the predictions of climate change scientists. I spent a few days in the forest of the island looking at hurricane damage to the vegetation. It is serious, but recovery and regrowth is rapid there. In Norway, even though I was on holiday, climate change seemed to dominate the

lectures and discussion on the ship. The melting of glaciers and permafrost, the thin polar ice and the advance of vegetation towards the pole were topical themes. Unfortunately my trip to Norway coincided with this year's AGM of the Wild Flower Society so my apologies for not being with you this year at what, I understand, was an excellent meeting.

A recent study by the University of East Anglia has calculated that up to half of plants and animal species in the world's most naturally rich areas, such as the Amazon and the Galapagos, could become extinct by the turn of the century if carbon emissions go unchecked and even if the Paris Climate Agreement 2°C target is met, these places could lose 25% of their species. Human-caused climate change is a rapid process with which plants have little time to adapt and evolve, so climate change is certainly a threat to some of our own native species such as our wonderful mountain flora. The protection of our wild flowers and those of many other places requires individual and societal action to stop the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses.

GHILLEAN PRANCE

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to a New Year and, hopefully, a productive botanical year. Yet again Janet John has compiled a wonderful programme of meetings for the Society and there should be something in the Year Book to encourage you to join us in the field. This magazine contains the reports of several of the field meetings from 2019 and this should give you a flavour of the types of events we organise. They are designed to appeal to all abilities so there should be something there to tempt everyone. So pull out your diary and start to plan your year ahead. It is advisable to apply early as many of the meetings, especially the multi-day ones, can book up quickly. If you are not already part of the 'Alerts' system and would like to be kept abreast of upcoming events, vacancies and programme changes, do sign up now. Details are in the Year Book (page 17).

In November, some members of your committee attended the BSBI Exhibition Meeting at the Natural History Museum in London, to promote the work of the Society. If you have joined the Society as a consequence of this, then welcome.

Part of the aim of this was to raise the profile of the Society. In addition, we want to start to build stronger links with other botanical organisations. With this aim in mind Nicola Dixon has agreed to act as our new Liaison Officer and would like to hear from members about their perceptions of the Society and how we might further the idea of building links with these groups. On the opposite page are three questions and Nicola would welcome your responses.

For those of you who keep Record Books, now is the time to put the finishing touches to your records and submit them to your Branch Secretary. I managed to complete two 1km squares last year, with the one on my doorstep yielding a surprising 226 records. Plant spotting made a lovely addition to our local walks throughout the year. As I live on the junction of four 1km squares, I intend to cover one a year to steadily build up a picture of my local parish. Why not rise to the challenge and investigate the floral diversity of your local patch.

ANNE KELL

2020 SUBSCRIPTIONS

With this mailing you should find a form for the renewal of your subscription. If you do not already pay by Standing Order please complete this and return it to the membership secretary, Sue Poyser, at your earliest opportunity to ensure the continuity of your membership and future mailings of the Wild Flower Magazine.

NOTICES

Questions from the Liaison Officer Nicola Dixon

As part of my new role as Liaison Officer I will be working to develop stronger links with other botanical organisations to allow the society to take advantage of new opportunities for collaboration and skills sharing. To help inform discussions on the nature of our society's involvement with other botanical organisations, I should like to ask for your thoughts on any of the following topics.

1. What makes this society unique? What do we offer that other botanical societies do not?
2. Where do you think it would be useful for the society to collaborate with another botanical organisation? This could be one of our current activities or something that we do not currently do.
3. What barriers (if any) do you feel exist to greater collaboration with other botanical societies?

Please e-mail your responses to wfs.liaisonofficer@gmail.com by the 15th February, 2020 for inclusion in discussions at the next executive committee meeting. All responses will be anonymised.

Many thanks in advance for your time and contributions to this key aspect of the society's activities.

Autumn Hunt

It has been decided to combine the Autumn One Day and One Week Hunts and have just one person acting as the Autumn Hunt Secretary. You can choose to hunt for plants in flower for as many days as you wish over that week. When you submit your list at the end of the hunt can you please include the number of days you spent recording.

Changes in roles

Heather Colls will be taking over from Julie Clarke and Ian Green as Autumn Hunt Secretary from 2020 and Pippa Hyde has taken over responsibility from Dorothy Ross for the Winter Months Hunt from the 2019/20 season. Our thanks go to Julie, Ian and Dorothy for all the work they have done in compiling records and writing reports on behalf of the Society.

Professor David Bellamy O.B.E.

It is with great sadness that I have to report the death, on Wednesday 16th December, of one of our past presidents, Professor David Bellamy O.B.E. He was a real inspiration to many botanists. An obituary will appear in the next issue of the Wild Flower Magazine.

WFS MEMBERS' WEEKEND AND AGM 7th - 9th SEPTEMBER

The 2019 Members' Weekend was based around Oxford, with the AGM being held at Wolvercote Village Hall and field meetings occurring in the local area. A Branch Secretaries' meeting was held on the previous Friday.

Before the formal proceedings of the AGM on the Saturday, members had the opportunity to explore Port Meadow led by Roger Heath-Brown. Further field meetings were held on the Sunday and Monday and reports on all these meetings can be found on pages 11 - 15.

AGM

The AGM was attended by 52 members. Only the main points will be covered here, with the full AGM minutes appearing on the website. If you are unable to access these via the website and would like to see a full copy, please contact Sheila Wynn, our General Secretary, sending a stamped, self-addressed A5 envelope.

Each of the officers of the Society presented their reports.

Robin Blades, our **Treasurer**, summarised the 2018 accounts, which were published with the summer issue of the magazine. They showed that subscription income has now returned to the normal level after being reduced in 2017 because of the change in timing of the renewal form. The Gift Aid figure reflects the subscriptions and donations in the previous year so the lower

subscriptions figure in 2017 reduced the 2018 Gift Aid. We received a legacy from Tom Fowler and also had a sale of books donated by Tom and others. We received some donations in memory of John Palmer following his funeral. We again sold some investments to help fund our grant-giving programme.

Grant expenditure was £9,099. From this we continued to support BSBI recording in Ireland for Atlas 2020, study days for Wildlife Trust volunteers and bursaries for young people attending FSC courses. Publications supported were the *Field Key to Winter Twigs* and the second edition of the *Wild Flowers of the Lizard*. We gave smaller grants to assist with four academic research projects.

In 2019 we are continuing to support Atlas 2020, the Wildlife Trust study days and FSC bursaries. From 2019 onwards we have increased the age range for the FSC grants from 18-25 to 18-30 and the maximum available to £1,000. Other projects being supported are a BSBI publication on grassland plants and the work of two individuals involved with conservation work on rare plants.

Robin thanked Sue Poyser for the excellent job she does as Membership Secretary. Membership was 646 at 31/12/18, up by 26 in the year, and is currently down to 613.

Robin thanked Bob Holder for carrying out the independent

examination of the 2018 accounts and proposed his re-election. This was agreed.

Anne Kell, the **Magazine Editor**, expressed her appreciation of the positive comments about the magazine she had received. She thanked John Swindells and Rodney Burton for proof-reading the magazine, a task which she hoped is becoming easier as she becomes more experienced.

Anne thanked all the contributors, whether they are responsible for the mammoth task of compiling branch or hunt reports, writing up meeting reports, providing photographs or simply providing copy on botanical matters and keys to diversify the range of articles in the magazine. She hoped that everyone would continue their good work.

Referring to the recent name changes in the fourth edition of Clive Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles*, Anne asked if, as well as doing their normal personal proof-reading, contributors could also check for name changes, using the new names where relevant and presenting them as follows: Scarlet Pimpernel *Lysimachia arvensis* (formerly *Anagallis arvensis*).

Janet John, our **Meetings Secretary**, reported there were seven main meetings of two or more days and 30 one-day meetings in 2019. There were meetings in England, Wales, Scotland and Jersey, covering 22 Counties. Of the 32 leaders involved, 21 are WFS members and 11 are from the BSBI. Meetings have again been well supported. She expressed

her gratitude to all leaders who give their time and share their knowledge and enthusiasm.

Janet listed her aims when planning the programme: to have a good range of meetings, to tempt members to attend, to hold meetings at botanical hotspots so that members have the thrill of seeing special plants in special places and to provide, as far as she is able, a meeting within comfortable reach of every member so that they can enjoy the camaraderie of botanising with fellow WFS members and get to know the flora in their own area of the UK.

She stressed that all meetings are open to all members, whatever their botanical knowledge, saying that we seem to cope very well with having a range of ability in a group, to quote one member this year "I came to Jersey on my own as a relative newcomer to the WFS and would like to thank members for their endless patience and for making me so welcome".

One small change from last year has been the inclusion of two meetings targeting specific plants. These were the Whitebeam *Sorbus* meeting in the Avon Gorge in September and the Glasswort *Salicornia* meeting at Oare Marshes in Kent in October. As these have both proved to be very popular Janet said that she is already thinking about the possibility of a three day meeting in North Wales in 2021 devoted to sedges for which Chris Metherell has offered to be leader and tutor. Janet asked for further ideas for meetings of this kind and for members to share their thoughts and suggestions for future meetings.

Nichola Hawkins, our **Publicity Secretary**, reported that she had set up a Twitter account, #wildflowersociety, which currently has 688 followers. She asked any members who are on Twitter to help by following us, liking and re-tweeting our posts, tagging us in any botanical posts and posting about WFS activities such as field meetings. Any members who don't use social media, but who have enjoyed a field meeting can e-mail her with a couple of pictures and a couple of sentences about where they went and what they saw and she will post it for them.

WFS T-shirts are still available to order online; the link can be found on our Twitter feed.

The Beginner's Diary has been updated, reflecting 'Stace 4' changes to plant names and families, as well as some updates to the recommended book list. The next job will be some updates to our New Member's Pack. This is sent to all new members telling them about Society activities and how to get the most out of membership, as well as books and resources for new botanists, so if any members would like to share any advice or recommendations please let Nichola know.

Nichola has continued to work with partners from WildFlowerHour (including BSBI, Plantlife and others) completing the set of 12 monthly HerbologyHunt sheets with 5 common flowers for children to find each month. These can be downloaded from the WFS website.

WFS leaflets are available for

members to give to interested people or leave in local places. Posters, display materials and a plant quiz kit can be requested for use at events.

Sheila Wynn, our **General Secretary**, said that it was good to see new members at the AGM as well as so many familiar faces. She thanked Roger Heath-Brown for all his efforts in organising and leading the weekend's field meetings and also thanked Janet John, Steve Little and Freda Miller for agreeing to help to lead Sunday's meeting. She also expressed her appreciation of everything that the Branch Secretaries do, saying that they perform an invaluable role in maintaining contact between members and their magazine reports are always interesting to read. During the last year, they have uncomplainingly received former Valhalla Branch members back into their branches, which has added to their workload. From comments at Friday's Branch Secretaries' Meeting, it all appears to have gone smoothly. Last year we formed a referee panel consisting of former Valhalla secretaries Peter Jepson, Heather Colls and Pippa Hyde, who were happy to be consulted by Branch Secretaries if they had any queries about records submitted by their Valhalla members. They reported that no requests for help have been received so far, so all seems to be working well.

She thanked the Competition Secretaries for all their work in collating and analysing the lists that members send in, as well as writing reports for the magazine. The various hunts are popular and are a good

way for people to get involved; often members who don't get to many of our field meetings like to do them.

Sheila reported that recently there have been two resignations of Competition Secretaries. Dorothy Ross has resigned as Winter Months' Hunt Secretary and Julie Clarke, after doing the job for almost 20 years, would like to step down as Autumn Hunt Secretary after the 2019 hunt. Sheila then thanked Pippa Hyde and Heather Colls who have willingly agreed to take over the roles of Winter Month's Hunt and Autumn Hunt respectively.

She also announced that this year has seen the retirement of our Exotics Secretary, Dr Stephen O'Donnell. Years ago, members used to send in records of alien species to the Exotics Secretary. These were then reported in the magazine. In recent years, this practice has died out mainly because many aliens that are commonly seen are now listed in Stace's floras and so can be included in Members' Record Books. Accordingly, the Committee has decided to discontinue this role.

Sheila reported that, so far, 5 copies of Stace's Flora have been exchanged using our 'Stace Exchange System' and asked members to let her know if they would like to participate.

Sheila then finished by thanking Peter Llewellyn for administering both our website and the WFS Facebook page which is very popular and has a number of keen participants who regularly post some stunning photos.

Ken Southall, our **Photographic Secretary**, reported that this year's new rules allowing digital entries to the Competition had been popular, with all but one entrant submitting digitally. He thanked the 12 members who had submitted 73 photographs and commented on the very high standard of entries. His report appears on page 8.

He said how pleased he was by the wonderful response to the 'Shoot and Show' category. The photos were on display and members attending the AGM were asked to vote for their favourite.

Peter Llewellyn thanked Ken for all his work in running the Photographic Competition and also complimented him on the excellent display of his own photos, saying he hoped we might be treated to a display of his photos of Australian plants next year.

Peter Llewellyn, our **Website Manager**, said that he was about half-way through updating the list of all British plants (approximately 7,800 plants that have at some time been recorded in Britain) on the website, in accordance with the names in 4th edition of Stace's *New Flora*. Peter encouraged members to join the WFS Facebook page which now has over 800 members.

Peter, as Chairman, and the rest of the committee were then re-elected unopposed. Pauline Wilson was elected unopposed to fill the vacancy caused by the retirement of Nicola Dixon as a General Committee Member.

Peter thanked Nicola Dixon for

running the WFS Alerts system and announced that she had been appointed by the Executive Committee to the new position of Liaison Officer.

Nicola explained that this new role will allow her to work towards developing stronger links with other botanical societies. She asked members to consider the three questions given in the current Notices (see page 3) and to provide her with feedback on their views in order to help inform discussions at future Executive Committee Meetings.

Post Meeting

The meeting was followed by a wonderful talk from Brenda Harold on The Wild Flowers of the Chilterns. This gave us a real feel for the area we were to visit over the next two

days introducing us to the diversity of plants that can be seen in the Chilterns.

The proceedings were followed by the traditional afternoon tea. During this time, Stephen Clarkson once again provided the popular plant quiz to challenge members, and the photos entered into the competition were displayed.

Over Sunday and Monday field meetings were arranged for members to visit local habitats and the reports on these meetings follow on page 11.

The 2020 AGM meeting will be held in Margam Discovery Centre, Port Talbot from 4th – 7th September. Put the date in your diary now.

SHEILA WYNN

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2019: RESULTS

Twelve members submitted a total of 73 pictures for this year's competition. Overall the standard was very high and once again, it proved very difficult to decide on the winners in each category. The competition was judged by myself and Sue Grayston. In each class, we came to virtually the same results, with just the order of placings to be discussed and finalised. We thought it justified this year to select one highly commended entry for each class.

The "best in show" picture was awarded to Anne Kell for her very eye-catching study of Blue Water-speedwell *Veronica anagallis-aquatica* showing up against the tranquil water background. For this,

Anne was awarded the Violet Schwerdt cup. Congratulations Anne! The picture appears on the back cover of this magazine.

The "Shoot and Show" class again proved very popular with sixty-eight entries on show (the same number as last year!). Sue Grayston's picture of Canary-grass *Phalaris canariensis* (pictured on the back cover of Autumn WFS magazine) was a clear winner, with eleven votes. Congratulations Sue!

This year saw the introduction of entries being submitted digitally, which will remain for future years, especially as there was only one entry received as a 'hard copy'.

Please take note of some alterations and amendments (mainly on how digital entries will need to be submitted) to the rules for next year, which appear in the 2020 Year Book.

Many thanks to everyone who took part in the competition. Now that entries can be sent digitally or as hard copy, I am hoping that more entries by more members will be received next year!

KEN SOUTHALL



Class 1 Habitat:

1st Richard Coomber
2nd David Caals
3rd Dennis Kell
H/C David Caals

Yellow-horned Poppy *Glaucium flavum*
Silver Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla conjuncta*
Corn Marigold *Glebionis segetum*
House Leek *Sempervivum tectorum*

Class 2 Plant Portrait:

1st Anne Kell

2nd David Morgan
3rd Charles Whitworth

H/C Stephen Clarkson

Blue Water-speedwell
Veronica anagallis-aquatica
Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio*
Alpine Saxifrage *Micranthes nivalis*
(formerly *Saxifraga nivalis*)
Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*

Class 3 Close-up:

1st Dennis Kell
2nd Richard Coomber
3rd Anne Kell

H/C Charles Whitworth

Corn Marigold *Glebionis segetum*
Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*
Hybrid Monkey/Lady Orchid
Orchis simia x *O. purpurea* = *O. angusticruris*
Blue Heath *Phyllodoce caerulea*

Class 4 Foreign Fields:

1st Sheila Wynn
2nd Dennis Kell
3rd David Morgan
H/C Dennis Kell

Globe Flowers *Trollius europaeus*
Perfoliate Alexanders *Smyrniolum olusatrum*
Snapdragon *Antirrhinum majus*
Crown Daisies *Glebionis coronaria*

Class 5 Human Element:

1st Stephen Clarkson
2nd Dennis Kell
3rd Dennis Kell
H/C Anne Kell

"Shadows"
"Spirit of the Bluebells"
"Contemplating the Edit"
"They said it was here somewhere"

"Shoot and Show":

Winner – Sue Grayston

Canary-grass *Phalaris canariensis*



Gipsywort
2nd in Close-up Class
Richard Coomber

WFS AGM and MEMBERS' WEEKEND WALKS, SEPTEMBER 2019

SATURDAY 7TH SEPTEMBER: PORT MEADOW, OXFORD

Once our party of 48 members had assembled, Roger Heath-Brown introduced us to Port Meadow. This 440 acre site is an ancient grazing meadow. Alfred the Great granted permission for the residents of Oxford to graze their livestock here and there is evidence of human settlements from the Bronze and Iron ages as well as Civil War fortifications. It is still used for horses and cattle today. The summer water levels vary with the groundwater supply and in recent years the meadow has been drier, hence the plant for which it is most famous, Creeping Marshwort *Helosciadium repens* (formerly *Apium repens*) has not been found there in the last two years. However, later in the weekend we were able to see this species at its re-introduction site at North Hinksey and there were many other flowers of interest on Port Meadow.

We headed off along the river and amongst the grazed and poached fringing vegetation of Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* we found Great Yellow-cress *Rorippa amphibia* in flower. Its yellowish-green stem leaves made it stand out on the far bank too. We found the terrestrial form of Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia* in flower. This is upright and has pubescent and more or less sessile leaves as opposed to the floating and glabrous, long-

stemmed foliage of the aquatic morph. To my delight, I came across Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris* (which I had seen for the first time very recently). I am more familiar with Sea Arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima* which grows in saltmarsh; Marsh Arrowgrass looks like a scaled down version of this. Both species have a basal rosette of succulent, half cylindrical leaves, but Marsh Arrowgrass is more delicate and usually has deep furrows on the upper surface of the leaves, towards the base.

Moving on to the meadow, we traversed oceans of Silverweed *Potentilla anserina* and, in the damper parts of the site, found Marsh Cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum* and Fool's-water-cress *Helosciadium nodiflorum* (formerly *Apium nodiflorum*). We then saw Strawberry Clover *Trifolium fragiferum*.

Some of us walked back to the Wolvercote Village Hall for the AGM and Tea Party via the canal. On the way we saw Oxford Ragwort (!) *Senecio squalidus* beside a concrete path and by the canal itself was Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, with its giant basal leaves which can reach over a metre long.

It was a very enjoyable morning. Thanks to everyone for their input and expertise.

LYS MUIRHEAD

SUNDAY 8TH SEPTEMBER: THREE SITES NEAR CHARLBURY

Owing to parking difficulties at the sites, our day was spent in two groups. Group A met two miles east of Charlbury, where the Salt Way long-distance footpath crosses the road. This path leads from Droitwich in Cheshire to Princes Risborough in the Chilterns, originally used for the transport of salt and more recently as a sheep drovers' road. Early arrivals amused themselves amongst the arable weeds and keyed out the common *cynapium* subspecies of Fool's Parsley *Aethusa cynapium* in which the bracteoles are twice as long as the pedicels. When all were finally assembled, we walked a short distance along the track to see the day's first rarity, Downy Woundwort *Stachys germanica*. A rather sad, very gone-over, single mature plant stood in a wire cage, but with a number of very soft downy first-year rosettes on the bare earth around – it likes disturbed ground. A loud nuthatch and Hoary Ragwort *Jacobaea erucifolius* (formerly *Senecio erucifolius*) consoled us.

Group B started at a site further along the Salt Way, north of Spelsbury to explore the margin of a field which Roger Heath-Brown explained was being maintained with limited cutting in order to support the rich community of arable plants there. The highlights were: Night-Flowering Catchfly *Silene noctiflora*, Red Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia*, Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia exigua* and both Round-leaved and Sharp-leaved Fluellen, *Kickxia spuria* and *K. elatine*. We also found the rarer subspecies of Fool's Parsley *Aethusa*

cynapium ssp. *agrestis* in which the bracteoles and pedicels are approximately the same length. John Poland saw a leveret whilst the rest were peering at plants.

The third site was a road-side verge between Chipping Norton and Hook Norton where we were treated to the fabulous sight of hundreds of Meadow Saffron *Colchicum autumnale* growing in the wide grassy verge. Excavation of a flower by Stephen Clarkson showed how long the corolla tube is, more than 20 cm as the flower base extends underground.

Thanks to some research by Steve Little and David Albon, there was also the opportunity to see some better specimens of Downy Woundwort growing along a track near Minster Lovell.

Everyone reconvened back in Wolvercote and, refreshed with ice-creams, continued to Godstow Nunnery, over the bridge from the Wolvercote car park. A local history plaque commemorated an afternoon spent by a boy and his "eccentric botanist" father in the vain search for Birthwort. We were more fortunate and found Birthwort *Aristolochia clematitis* flourishing in the ditch and scrub on the far side of the Nunnery. The flowers were finished, but there were some impressive gourd-like fruits. We also inspected Fiddle Dock *Rumex pulcher* with its twisted inflorescences, memorably described by our leader Roger Heath-Brown as "bad hair day".

The keenest WFS members departed on a final trip to find Tasteless Water-

Birthwort

pepper *Persicaria mitis*. One of the authors, Helen Dignum, completed the day with a paddleboard trip around Port Meadow along the River Thames and found a large specimen of Bohemia Knotweed *Reynoutria x bohemica* on the Wolvercote riverbank. Others found the local pub or teashop for refreshment at the end of a splendid day – many thanks to Roger for leading.

SUE RILEY AND
HELEN DIGNUM



MONDAY 9TH SEPTEMBER: WARBURG RESERVE, BIX BOTTOM, HENLEY-ON-THAMES

More than 30 members met at the Warburg Reserve, a hidden gem in the Chiltern Hills. The reserve was acquired by the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Naturalist Trust in 1967 and is named in honour of E. F. Warburg, co-author of the flora that many of us know as 'CTW', and also a founder member of BBONT (now Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust).

Even before arriving at the car park, the first plant of interest had been spotted by Gareth Bursnall. This was Pale Toadflax *Linaria repens* growing on the top of an old wall.

The reserve warden, Kelly Hodges, welcomed us and explained that the site covers 250 acres and comprises

chalk grassland, ancient beech woods and mixed woodland. Management is carried out using traditional methods: the mixed woodland is coppiced in the winter, by volunteers using hand tools, and the grassland is scythed in the autumn, prior to being grazed by the trust's own small flock of sheep and three Dexter cattle.

In two groups, led separately by Kelly and another warden, Alex Rose, we walked through the reserve, passing young coppice of mainly Hazel *Corylus avellana*, with many other species including both Wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana* and Guelder-rose *V. opulus*. There were open areas with a rich chalk grassland flora including Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, Marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and Wild Thyme *Thymus drucei* (formerly *T. polytrichus*). Agrimony

Photo: Dennis Kell



Warburg Warden supervises Chiltern Gentian identification

Agrimonia eupatoria was also frequent here. Scattered amongst this were some plants with bell-shaped fruits and reflexed outer bristles. These had abundant sessile glands on the lower-side of the leaves and were confirmed as Fragrant Agrimony *A. procera* by John Poland.

We continued through mature woodland dominated by Oak *Quercus robur*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Birch *Betula pendula*. We then walked out onto an extensive area of open grassland where Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella*, the rare Chiltern Gentian *G. germanica* and the hybrid between them *G. x pamplinii* all flourished. Members scrutinised the two parents and were then able to find



Measuring the key characters of the hybrid Gentian.

Corolla more than 2x as long as calyx

hybrid plants with the help of, not only our own books, but with a detailed list of characters of the three taxa provided by the wardens. The Chiltern Gentian is more robust than the Autumn Gentian and its paler corolla lobes are twisted before opening. Hybrids appeared generally more like the robust parent but lacked the twisted corolla.

The two groups returned to the car park and enjoyed lunch together in the adjacent picnic area. It was only as we finished that the predicted rain started and we all made our way home after a most enjoyable and interesting weekend.

SUE DENNESS

Photos: Dennis Kell



Chiltern Gentian

RECORDING FOR ATLAS 2020: IRELAND

The aim this year was to visit hectads where there was less than 60% of species refound since 2000. Only one hectad visited had no post 2000 records. As in previous years it was easier to reach the target in hectads where there was a lower number of species recorded. 23 days of recording took place from April to October.

A list of species not recorded post 2000 was printed out for each hectad. Once I arrived in the hectad, the first place I found to park became the starting point and I would give this monad a good visit. I would then cross off all the species I had found on the list. Then I would go habitat hunting to pick up as many of the other species on the list as possible.

The DDb (see below) was also searched to see which rare species had 6 figure or better grid references. These were searched for. Some hectads visited had no records better than a hectad resolution. In total, 26 hectads were visited.

Recording was done in South Kerry (H1), North Kerry (H2), West Cork (H3), Mid Cork (H4), North Tipperary (H10), Carlow (H13), Wicklow (H20), Dublin (H21), West Mayo (H27) & Sligo (H28). West Cork was only briefly visited as I hadn't realised I had crossed over the border from Mid Cork.

All records have been checked before sending to the DDb. All errors found were corrected. I'm in the process of verifying all records I sent into the DDb, to save the Vice-county recorder from having to do it.

The more interesting finds this year seemed to be the re-finding of species not recorded for some time in the vice-county or hectad. In mid Cork, Heath Dog-violet *Viola canina* provided the first record since the 1962 Atlas. Bearded Couch *Elymus caninus* was only the second record for North Kerry from woodland around Killarney Lake. The only

previous record for the vice-county was from one of the islands in Killarney Lake in 2005 and this was thought to be an error. This record has now been reinstated because of my find. Also from North Kerry, Bladderwort *Utricularia australis* was found in a pool near the shore of Killarney Lake. This is the first record for Kerry since Atlas 2000 and first hectad record since 1887. From South Kerry, Dotted Sedge *Carex punctata* was found in a hectad where there had been no records since 1860 but the *Carex* was growing where I expected I might find it.

The best two native species found for a vice-county were: Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa* from West Mayo as it used to be common in West Galway, the adjoining vice-county. I was very surprised it has not been recorded from Mayo before. And Long-stalked Crane's-bill *Geranium columbinum* from dunes in South Kerry, as this site is about 100 km away from the next nearest site with a record.

PAUL GREEN

DDb = Distribution Database. This is a database compiled by the BSBI. It provides access to the millions of botanical records collated by the society. The data are used to generate the distribution maps and the underlying detailed records can be made available for academic research and other specialist uses, such as exploring areas to confirm previous records for the 2020 Atlas.

FIELD MEETINGS 2019

JERSEY 28th - 31st MAY

Four whole days of botanising on Jersey; what a treat. Jersey is the largest of the Channel Islands, approximately 14 miles by 9 miles. Close to the Continent it has a warm, maritime climate encouraging a unique and rarely seen flora. During our stay we were lucky to see swathes of Loose-flowered Orchids *Anacamptis laxiflora* and the attractive Jersey Fern *Anogramma leptophylla*, which is only a few centimetres in length. We also got acquainted with plants of Jersey Thrift *Armeria arenaria* and Jersey Pink *Dianthus gallicus*. However, both of these flower later in the year. We were fortunate to have good weather, knowledgeable and inspiring leaders, a small and companionable group, great places to stop for lunch and a wealth of fantastic flora to enjoy.

Tuesday 28th May

On our first day we walked from St. Ouen's Pond to Noir Pré and near our lunch stop at Sands restaurant we saw a patch of Curved Hard-grass *Parapholis incurva*. This gave rise to the comment from Lyn Jones who was assisting Anne Haden as leader, "I have never seen it looking so spectacular". According to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary the definition of spectacular reads:- **Spectacular: striking, amazing, lavish fig. strikingly large or obvious.** Botany certainly gives a good deal of pleasure and happy smiles on faces and only another

keen botanist really understands Lyn's use of the word "spectacular" to describe a smallish patch of short grass.

Curved Hard-grass



Flowers, grasses, sedges; we were spoilt for choice with the rich diversity of plants we saw. On this first day, personal flower favourites included Rough Star-thistle *Centaurea aspera*, Sand Catchfly *Silene conica*, Fragrant Evening-primrose *Oenothera stricta* and Early Forget-me-not *Myosotis ramosissima* – it was tiny! I am making a special effort to improve my knowledge of grasses and there were plenty to identify, including Small Sweet-grass *Glyceria declinata*, Heath-grass *Danthonia*

Photo: Lyn Jones

decumbens, Sea Fern-grass *Catapodium marinum* and Silver Hair-grass *Aira caryophyllea*. In this wettish landscape we were sure to find sedges and Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*, False Fox-sedge *C. otrubae*, Sand Sedge *C. arenaria* and Greater Pond-sedge *C. riparia* were easy to find.

JANET JOHN



Photo: Anne Kell

threads of Dodder *Cuscuta epithymum*. Ancient Prostrate Broom *Cytisus scoparius* ssp. *maritimus* with thick woody stems reflected the harsh environment.

There was much discussion when we found a 'blue' Scarlet Pimpernel *Lysimachia arvensis* (formerly *Anagallis arvensis*) growing alongside the red variety. Lyn introduced us to the delights of Brome identification. Then as the rain clouds gathered, we made a loo stop at Lewis Tower where we saw the Tassel Hyacinth *Muscari comosum* and Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale*. As the rain descended, we went to Faulkners Sea Food BBQ, a real treat. Fresh fish, crab and scallops prepared in front of us and eaten in delightful but rather soggy surroundings. After a quick tour of the old potato fields where we found Henbit Dead-nettle *Lamium amplexicaule* and Small Nettle *Urtica urens*, we admitted defeat and returned to our Hotel.

I came to Jersey on my own and as a relative newcomer to the WFS and would like to thank members for their endless patience and for making me so welcome.

JANET BLIZARD

Wednesday 29th May

Today Lyn Jones was our very knowledgeable leader for this flora and food treat. We met at Grosnez Castle, a windswept fortified headland with stunning views over Guernsey, Herm and Sark to mainland France. Steep pink granite cliffs plunged down to the sea. Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Heather *Calluna vulgaris* were adorned with red

Thursday 30th May

Another beautiful day saw us visiting St Catherine's Bay. Somewhat unusually, we started the day by going into a huge tent to see an amazing sand sculpture by 'The Sandwizard'. Suitably impressed we continued up the road finding Musk Stork's-bill *Erodium moschatum* with its big papery bracts, Smaller Tree-mallow *Malva multiflora* (formerly *M.*

pseudolavatera) and Common Mallow *M. sylvestris*, which has a black dot at the point where the stem joins the leaf. Also, in one patch, growing together, were Small Nettle *Urtica urens*, Fat Hen *Chenopodium album* and Nettle-leaved Goosefoot *Chenopodium murale* (formerly *Chenopodium murale*). Seeing them together was helpful for identification. We saw a number of tiny flowers, amongst them Sea Pearlwort *Sagina maritima* (no bristles on the end of the leaf), Procumbent Pearlwort *S. procumbens* (little hair on end of leaf and roots at nodes) and Four-leaved Allseed *Polycarpon tetraphyllum*. And once again, with my focus on grasses, some new ones to add to my list were Rescue Brome *Ceratochloa cathartica*, with its large flat spikes, and Tall Fescue *Festuca arundinacea*, with hairs on its auricles when young. The day was punctuated with another good lunch stop, sitting in the sunshine eating king prawns, calamari or a big bowl of delicious vegetable soup. Another satisfying and interesting day.

Friday 31st May

Ousaine Common was convenient for where most of us were staying so breakfast could be taken a little more leisurely. Most of us stayed at the Hotel Miramar which looked after us well. We were still adding to our plant lists and we saw the pods of Sand Crocus *Romulea columnae*, a magnificent Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis*, Spotted Rock-rose *Tuberaria guttata*, whose petals drop off by lunch time, and the lovely tiny Bristle Club-rush *Isolepis setacea*, which needs good eyes to spot. My sedge quest was enhanced by Pill Sedge *Carex pilulifera* and Common Sedge

C. nigra.

It is only possible in a meeting report to give a tempting flavour of the experience. I hope you have an appreciation of the abundance of flora we discovered, the stunning scenery we saw and the fun and pleasure that we shared. Many thanks to Anne Haden for all her preparation and time and to Lyn and Amanda Jones for stepping in to help.

JANET JOHN

Photo: Anne Kell



CHILTERNS 5th - 6th JUNE

Wednesday 5th June Hartslock

Hartslock is a wonderful nature reserve owned by BBOWT and sits on a chalk slope close to the river Thames about two miles south of Goring in Oxfordshire. A local wood is known as Hartslock Wood. Back in the early 1500s the Harts, a local family of note, apparently owned a lock across the river, just below the woods. In 1710 it was just considered to be a 'fishing lock' – a wooden construction used to support nets and eel traps. Between 1804 and 1910 the lock was gradually demolished as it was a hazard to shipping.

We met in the car park in Goring and were greeted by the leader for the day Roger Heath-Brown. Once briefed we set off south along the Thames path to access the nature reserve, a walk of about two miles. En route Roger stopped us frequently to look at interesting trees and plants. We compared the leaves of Norway Maple *Acer platanoides* with those of Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, conveniently growing side by side. Further along we were also able to compare Portugal Laurel *Prunus lusitanica* and Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*, again growing in close proximity on the edge of an old Victorian park. A problematic Elm *Ulmus* was left unresolved. The leaves were not large enough for Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra* or hairy enough for English Elm *Ulmus procera* and were longer than the leaves of both those species. Even further along we encountered Almond

Willow *Salix triandra*. The male catkins have three stamens hence the scientific name. On mature trees the bark characteristically breaks off in patches.

Growing on the bank of the river we saw Wild Turnip or, as Roger preferred, Bargeman's Cabbage *Brassica rapa* ssp. *campestris*. Whether this was actually eaten by bargemen we did not know but there were houseboats moored nearby lending credence to the idea. By the railway bridge we found Great Lettuce *Lactuca virosa* and a patch of Round-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium rotundifolium*. Having found so much of interest along the way we were almost half an hour late for our rendezvous with the reserve warden Chris Raper. Luckily he was charming and seemingly unconcerned by our late arrival. From his vantage point high up on the slope of the first field he must have been able to follow our somewhat erratic progress.

The first slope on entering the reserve is known as the Lower Field. Originally this was the main stronghold of the Monkey Orchid *Orchis simia*, one of the main targets of our visit. Although Monkey Orchids are widespread in Europe, through central France and around the Mediterranean, in the UK the Monkey Orchid has always had a restricted range.

In the years leading up to WW2 the Hartslock colony was apparently constant at about 200 flowering

plants. After the war the American army sold off surplus tracked vehicles to local farmers and, with the advent of more powerful tractors, this opened up the possibilities for cultivating all but the steepest slopes. In the early 1950s most local hills, including the main orchid colony in the Lower Field, were ploughed up to plant cereals in an attempt to end post-war rationing. Luckily this practice only went on for a couple of years as the farmers quickly realised that the soils were too poor to make farming worthwhile. The ploughing did not extend further up the hill to where the orchid colony exists now. The land here is steeper, partially scrubbed over and protected by a thick hedge which prevented easy access. It is likely that Monkey Orchids already grew here in low numbers but when they heard about the destruction, local people supplemented these plants by replanting tubers that they rescued from the destruction in the Lower Field.

In the late 1950s and 60s local botanists and members of the Reading & District Natural History Society helped monitor the orchids and provided a limited form of protection for them. Then in 1975/76 BBOWT, the local Wildlife Trust, bought Hartslock, thus guaranteeing its future protection.

Before we went in search of the orchids there was much of interest to see on the lower slopes. We found Chalk Milkwort *Polygala calcarea*, which has a rich purple colouration, and can be distinguished from Common Milkwort *P. vulgaris* by its

growth habit. Chalk Milkwort has several stems rising from a loose basal leaf rosette whereas Common Milkwort has a single stem with the leaves gradually getting smaller towards the top. In this area we also found Sainfoin *Onobrychis viciifolia* and several Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera*.

On the higher part of the slope we started to encounter Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor* which Chris explained had been brought in during the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 when farmers were unable to move livestock. The local farmer brought in fodder for livestock grazing on the reserve and swept out his trailer, including seeds of Yellow Rattle, at the top of the hill. At the moment the Yellow Rattle is a welcome addition as it suppresses the growth of grasses. Let us hope it does not become too invasive. In this area we found the elusive Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. This is a beautiful little plant putting out its fertile spike fairly early in the year before it is overwhelmed by other vegetation.



Photo: Faye Banks



Hybrid Monkey/Lady Orchid

Photos: Anne Kell

At this point we encountered our first Monkey Orchid. They grow alongside taller hybrid plants *Orchis x angusticruris* which are a hybrid between Monkey Orchids and Lady Orchids *O. purpurea*. Hartslock is the only site in Britain where these hybrid plants are found. They first appeared in about 2005. The Monkey and Hybrid Orchids were coming to the end of their flowering season but were still a beautiful sight. Chris told us that there are approximately 300 Monkey Orchid plants with about 100 flowering each year. This year there had been slightly fewer due to the prolonged dry conditions. The Lady

Orchids had not flowered this year, probably for the same reason. They must have been introduced at some point as DNA analysis shows that their nearest relatives come from Provence in France. A wet late summer followed by a wet spring provides the optimum conditions. Twayblade *Neottia ovata* was also growing inconspicuously nearby.

Having reached the highest point in the field we sat down for lunch with a stunning view across the Thames valley. This was not without its hazards as the ground was covered with Dwarf Thistles *Cirsium acaule*. Even the busy mainline railway, which runs along the valley, did not detract from the experience as we watched the frequent passage of long goods trains.

Where we sat down were also patches of beautiful Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, more delicate than the Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* which was also growing there.

The slope was also covered with light scrub mainly Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Dog Roses, *Rosa canina* and Sweetbriar *R. rubiginosa*. This scrub is actively but not aggressively managed by the Trust. We spent some time comparing the Sweetbriar and Dog Rose. The Sweet-briar leaves, which have red glaucous hairs and appear red edged, smell of apples when rubbed and the leaves are softer and more delicate than those of the Dog Rose.

Having finished lunch we set off in search of Downy-fruited Sedge *Carex*

'They said it was here somewhere'
H/C Human Element Class
Searching for Downy-fruited Sedge



filiformis, actually not much of a search as Chris knew exactly where to find it. Hartslock is one of the few sites in the country where this sedge can be found and it is limited to a very small patch. Indeed the theory is that this patch was created when a bale of hay was brought up from the Lower Field where the ground is wetter. The patch is about the size of a scattered hay bail (see picture). Downy-fruited sedge is not normally found on dry chalk slopes. This must have happened during or pre-war as the ploughing during the fifties destroyed the sedge colony in the Lower Field so this higher patch is now its only stronghold.

In the same general area as the Downy-fruited Sedge we also found Glaucous Sedge, *C. flacca*. There were also patches of Common Dodder *Cuscuta epithymum* and very dwarfed Clustered Bellflowers *Campanula glomerata*, the poor soil causing the dwarfing. Within the general habitat we also had Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Quaking-grass *Briza media* and Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*.

At this point we made a small diversion into the woodland above to view White Helleborines *Cephalanthera damasonium*. Many had gone to seed but a few were still in flower.

We then traversed the slope in search of Bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum* which, when found in full flower, delighted us with its delicate starry flowers.

A rather lengthy discussion ensued over a patch of Slender Bedstraw

Galium pumilum, first spotted by an ornithologist in the party. The identification of this rare plant was not universally agreed upon. Chris took a sample, which was confirmed by Fred Rumsey at the Natural History Museum. Chris works at the museum as manager of the UK Species Inventory. We were very lucky to have him show us around as he also regaled us with horrifying stories of dead rats in baked bean tins and any number of insects found in food samples sent into the museum for testing. We were also educated by him about snails, bees and flies, parasitic flies being his speciality.

At this point we were forced to make a detour down the slope due to electric fencing surrounding a very attractive flock of black curly-horned sheep. This took us down to the edge of an ancient Yew Forest of large extent, not ancient as yew trees go but probably a thousand years old according to Chris. Having gone up and down the very steep slope several times I was reminded of the Grand Old Duke of York nursery rhyme where he marched his men to the top of the hill and marched them down again. We certainly went up and down many times. The Bee Orchids in this area were varied and attractive many having multiple flowers on each stem.

Having almost decided to make our way home we were delayed for some time by a solitary Knapweed plant, possibly Brown Knapweed *Centaurea jacea*. A very detailed examination of the basal phyllaries was carried out which in Brown Knapweed have a +/- shiny pale brown, irregularly jagged

apical portion, capitula usually pseudo-radiate and matching diagram 8 in Stace's comparison. Again, there was no universal agreement, but no blows were struck.

We then made our weary way back to Goring having had an excellent day. Many thanks to Roger Heath-Brown for his excellent scouting, plant discussions and superb organisation and to Chris Raper for freely giving his time to show us around the site and for regaling us with many interesting anecdotes.

FAYE BANKS

Thursday 6th June Fingest and Pyrton

Fifteen members met at Fingest, Buckinghamshire, in the heart of the unspoilt Hambleden Valley in the Chilterns. Led by Janet and Gwyn John, we set off along a footpath up the valley.

Janet declared her aim of improving her grasses identification skills and challenged us to identify some grasses. Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Barren Brome *Anisantha sterilis* and False Oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatior* were quickly spotted, followed by Soft-brome *Bromus hordeaceus*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, and Smooth Meadow-grass *Poa pratensis*. We compared the one-sided spikelet of *Festuca* with the more Christmas tree-like *Poa* spikelet. Hairy Brome *Bromopsis ramosa* was plucked from the top of a bank, visibly hairy with long downward pointing hairs on the stems. We found Annual Meadow-



Dragon's Teeth

grass *Poa annua*, Rough Meadow-grass *Poa trivialis* with its long ligule and rough sheath, and Meadow Brome *Bromus racemosus* (formerly *Bromus commutatus*) with more pointed spikelets. Wood Melick *Melica uniflora* is the only grass with an ante-ligule, on the other side of the stem from its ligule.

We found a number of Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale* with the usual grey-green foliage. We saw Field Maple *Acer campestre* and were reminded that the native species has small well-lobed leaves. We also found a Spurge Laurel *Daphne laureola* with plenty of black berries.

The path continued along a field

Photo: Ken Southall

margin where we found the dainty Small Toadflax *Chaenorhinum minus*, and compared Great Brome *Anisantha diandra* in the barley field with Barren Brome *A. sterilis*. The Great Brome was taller, towering above the barley with larger and more erect seed heads and longer awns and spikelets. We contrasted Italian Rye-grass *Lolium multiflorum*, which had awns and more overlapping spikelets, with Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*.

Lunch was in a sunny sheltered triangular meadow where we sat carefully among the Dragon's-teeth *Lotus maritimus* (formerly *Tetragonolobus maritimus*) long established at this site. It is a low-growing plant with generous lemon-yellow flowers typical of the Pea Family. A few pods were found, with the serrated double row of ridges, like a crocodile's (or dragon's) lower jaw, which gives the plant its name. Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, were also in the meadow. We added Upright Brome *Bromopsis erecta*, Quaking-grass *Briza media*, Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis* and Downy Oat-grass *Avenula pubescens* to our grass tally.

After lunch we climbed a steep chalk path, with the hope of finding Common Wintergreen *Pyrola minor* but extensive path works had disturbed the habitat. We entered woodland, finding Woodruff *Galium odorata*, Wood Millet *Milium effusum* and an occasional White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*. We eventually emerged onto a splendid hilltop meadow and spied the magenta pink flowers of Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* among the long grass. There was plenty of

Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, typical of unimproved meadow grassland.

Our path down through old beech woodland gave us views of several, then many, then hosts of White Helleborines *Cephalanthera damasonium* on the woodland floor, fenced off from the path. A group of six Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* at the foot of a large beech tree, best appreciated through binoculars, was almost the same colour as the forest floor.

Once back in Fingest village, we drove in convoy a few miles to Pyrton and walked along the road to find the last rarity of the day, Green Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum germanicum* growing on the verge and inside a strip of woodland.

Thank you to Janet and Gwyn for leading a splendid expedition, and certainly improving my grass identification skills.

HELEN DIGNUM



Photo: Ken Southall

PEMBROKESHIRE 13th - 14th JUNE

Thursday 13th June St. David's Head

Eight of us and our leader, Jeremy Ison, set off along the Pembrokeshire Coast Path from the car park just above the RNLI lifeboat station at St. Justinian (2 miles west of St. David's) towards Porthselau beach. The weather had been uncharacteristically cold for mid-June so we went with gloves at the ready but were lucky enough to be sheltered for most of the day.

The first noteworthy sight was a dense patch of Pellitory-of-the-wall *Parietaria judaica*, which totally obscured a length of drystone wall on the landward side of the path. This wall soon became a beautiful natural rock garden of English Stonecrop *Sedum anglicum*, Navelwort *Umbilicus rupestris*, Thrift *Armeria maritima* ssp. *maritima*, Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* ssp. *lapponica*, Sea Campion *Silene uniflora* and more. The first sedge of the day was keyed out as Small-fruited Prickly-sedge *Carex muricata* ssp. *pairae* which favours western turf-covered walls as a habitat. Jeremy pointed out some Sheep's-bit *Jasione montana* and reminded us that it is not a scabious but a member of the Bellflower family. Soon a change in soil type was reflected in the flora; Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* were growing alongside Silver Hair-grass *Aira caryophyllea*.

Our lunchtime treat was a late-flowering Spring Squill *Scilla verna* and soon afterwards we came across the highlight of the day, Hairy Greenweed *Genista pilosa* which formed a green carpet on the seaward slope. There were still a few flowering shoots so we were able to imagine the spectacle of yellow flowers which would have carpeted the area a few weeks earlier. As we neared the beach we examined a patch of *Potentilla*, identified as Trailing Tormentil *P. anglica* and spotted our first Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. There were more Marsh Orchids to come as we moved inland through a wet meadow.

A garden wall at Pencarnan Farm provided the opportunity to revise ferns. We found a small specimen of Soft Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* and noted the soft feel, shortly-stalked pinnules and rounded pinnule "thumb" which help distinguish it from Hard Shield-fern. We examined the dark stipe-base of Black Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* and the wiry black stem of Maidenhair Spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes*. Along the road Jeremy found Garden Parsley *Petroselinum crispum* growing at the base of a farm building at Rhosson in the area where he'd previously identified Corn Parsley *P. segetum*. He began to question the accuracy of his previous record but all became clear when Corn Parsley was found growing at the base of a nearby building.

Back at the car park there was time for one last glance at Ramsey Island before thanking Jeremy for introducing us to this beautiful part of the coast and for sharing his botanical knowledge of the area, a favourite holiday spot for him and his family.

SHEENA PATERSON

Friday 14th June Dowrog Common

A select group of people braved the cool conditions to explore this area of wet heathland, with Jeremy Ison as our leader. The first plant of interest was Wild Onion *Allium vineale* growing at the roadside. Inside the reserve Bog Pimpernel *Lysimachia tenella* (formerly *Anagallis tenella*), was flowering amongst Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Heath Wood-rush *Luzula multiflora* and Common Sedge *Carex nigra*. The tiny Yellow Centaury *Cicendia filiformis* was abundant in trampled areas. Unfortunately there was not enough sunshine to tempt the flowers to open. Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* were nearby in the less trodden areas. There were many specimens of Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Heath Spotted-orchid *D. maculata*, with hybrids between the two. Carnation Sedge *C. panicea*, Common Yellow-sedge *C. dimissa* and the distinctive Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris* were found in the same area. Ragged-Robin *Silene flos-cuculi* and Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* were along the track. A pool

of water held Floating Club-rush *Eleogiton fluitans* and we discovered two leaking wellingtons amongst the group. The rare Wavy-leaved St. John's-wort *Hypericum undulatum* contrasted in appearance to Marsh St. John's-wort *H. elodes*. Drier ground held Western Gorse *Ulex galli*, providing hiding places for adders, photographed by Ken Southall. Bright blue flowers of Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* studded the grassland. A relatively dry area was found for lunch near stands of Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*. After lunch a nearby stream was explored revealing Three-lobed Crowfoot *Ranunculus tripartitus*, Ivy-leaved Crowfoot *R. hederaceus* and Lesser Water-plantain (not a plantain at all) *Baldellia ranunculoides*. Lesser Water-plantain has a distinctive smell of coriander when crushed. In the same stream was Narrow-fruited Watercress *Nasturtium microphyllum*. A large pool held abundant Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* (a useful herb in the treatment of rheumatic conditions) and the attractive Marsh Cinquefoil *Comarum palustre* was in flower nearby.

Leaving the Reserve, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* was seen in flower among the *Sphagnum*. The road through the Reserve was then walked in the hope of seeing Lesser Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera bifolia*, which had been recorded here in the past. Unfortunately there was no sign of this orchid but there were fine specimens of Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* in the verge. A very flattened specimen of Creeping Willow *Salix repens* was growing in the centre of the road

together with Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*.

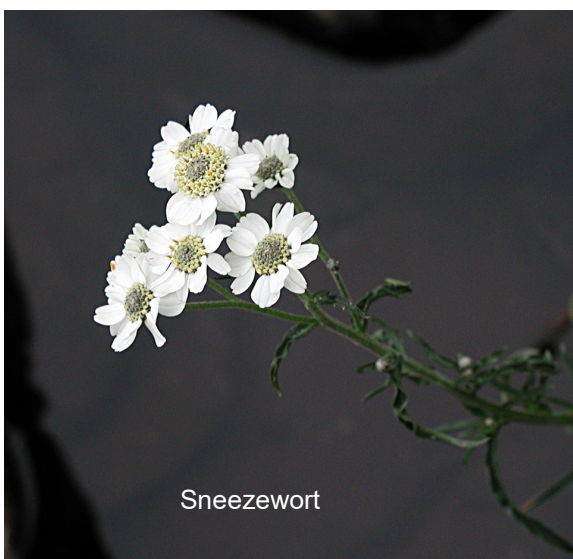
Our thanks go to Jeremy Ison for guiding us and to Janet John for organising a most interesting and informative excursion.

BARBARA LEWIS

And as a footnote:-

Barbara Lewis and I are practising medical herbalists with an interest in the historical use of herbs. It is always interesting to check plants seen at meetings against entries in Geoffrey Grigson's *The Englishman's Flora*, first published in 1958 and illustrated with woodcuts from sixteenth-century herbals. This is a rich source of information about the historical, folkloric, culinary, medicinal, magical and agricultural use of plants – together with their local common names. Herb Robert has over a hundred, suggesting past importance. On this occasion, it transpired that Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica* was used to treat toothache and we found that chewing the leaf had a decidedly numbing effect on the tongue. Stephen Clarkson is well-informed on plant smells – including those of their roots. Members' reactions to plant odours display an intriguing variation - something that smells delightful to one person may smell like old oil-cloth to another. Apparently, hunter-gatherers have an abundant vocabulary for smells.

Plant medicine, volatile oils in particular, is beginning to appear to be the medicine of the future, as well as that of our ancestral past. Antibiotic resistance is already with us. There is a growing body of detailed, scientific research into the



Sneezewort

ability of specific essential plant oils to inhibit specific pathogens.

Any part of a plant, buds, flowers, leaves, fruit, stem, bark, rind, root, or gum, can be steamed to release its aromatic volatile oil with its individual, distinct smell. These secondary metabolites, unique to each plant, are part of a plant's protection against disease or predation. Culinary herbs, formerly used to preserve foods in the days before refrigeration, often have antimicrobial properties, but if the pathogen is identified, it can be treated directly. Although this looks like being the medicine of the future, botanists able to verify plant sources are in short supply. There are no full-time botany degree courses in the UK and herbal medicine degree courses are being curtailed. WFS members with their expertise in plant identification may find themselves in great demand in the future.

NICKY WESSON

Photo: Peter Llewellyn

BRAUNTON BURROWS 22nd - 23rd JUNE

Braunton Burrows is the largest sand dune system in England being four square miles in extent. It was a National Nature Reserve but was delisted in 1996 due to disagreements between the owners and Natural England about the management of the site. It is privately owned by the Christie estate but leased long term by the MOD for military training. It is open to the public and heavily used by dog walkers, somewhat to the detriment of the wildlife as the dogs race around unrestrained. The management of the site is still a problem as much of The Burrows is being invaded by scrub. Rabbits keep the turf short to some extent and cattle are grazed in the central area but the situation is far from ideal and the grazing cattle damage the flora. There are noticeably fewer orchids in the area grazed by cattle than in the rest of The Burrows.

We were lucky enough to be led on these excursions by Mary Breeds who has written the definitive book on the wild flowers of The Burrows and knows the whole dune system intimately. We also had several members in the party who were very knowledgeable and happy to educate the rest of us, which was much appreciated.

The dunes at Braunton are special in containing a series of dune slacks that are generally wet in the winter months but dry out in the summer, although several have standing water even in the drier seasons.

Our first day concentrated on the central part of the Burrows with a circular trip of about four miles from the Sandy Lane car park out to the fore-shore and back. This took seven hours with many stops for discussion along the way. The second day concentrated on the southern end of the Burrows based on the Broadsand car park.

The Burrows is home to many rare plants most of which we managed to see in flower. Sea Stock *Matthiola sinuata*, which has a dusky pink flower, grows on the beach and in the fore-dunes. It is fragrant, especially in the evening, when it attracts moths. It is a biennial or short lived perennial. Sand Toadflax *Linaria arenaria* is known from nowhere else in Britain. It was introduced into The Burrows from France in 1892. It now occurs throughout The Burrows but is most abundant in the southern section where it often carpets the sides of dunes. White Horehound *Marrubium vulgare* occurs at only two sites one of which is conveniently right beside the Broadsands car park where it grows alongside the elegant seaside speciality Slender Thistle *Carduus tenuiflorus*. Towards the end of the second day we encountered several flowering gentians. It seemed a little early for the Autumn Gentian but one of our number carefully keyed these out as *Gentianella amarella* ssp. *occidentalis*. This was previously known as Dune Gentian *Gentianella uliginosa* but Stace, in his fourth edition, has reassigned it to a subspecies.

Braunton Burrows

The Water Germander *Teucrium scordium* and the Round-leaved Wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia* ssp. *maritima* were not in flower, so we only saw the leaves.

There were two rare rushes. The very rare Round-headed Club-rush *Scirpoides holoschoenus*, which is known from only two sites in the UK, was discovered in The Burrows by John Rae in 1662 and is frequent in the open, damp slacks in the southern part. The geographically rare Sharp Rush *Juncus acutus*, which is limited to coastal sites in Southern Britain, is locally common in The Burrows and is very sharp indeed.

At this time of year orchids are abundant, mainly Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* but also the rarer Early Marsh-orchid *D. incarnata* ssp. *coccinea* which is, as the name suggests, red rather than the normal orchid pink. On the foreshore dunes we also found many Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* both the normal variety but also another variety var. *belgarum* sometimes growing next to each other.

On the beach were Prickly Saltwort *Salsola kali* and Sea Rocket *Cakile maritima*.

Most of the slacks were covered with Creeping Willow *Salix repens* var.

argentea which has shiny, soft white leaf backs. There were also several hybrid willows which caused much debate.

With such a wealth of rare plants it was easy to overlook some of the commoner species which give The Burrows its distinctive character, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Western Eyebright *Euphrasia tetraquetra*, Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Bog Pimpernel *Lysimachia tenella* (formally *Anagallis tenella*), Scarlet Pimpernel *L. arvensis* (formerly *A. arvensis*), Brookweed *Samolus valerandi* etc. These slacks were



Photo: Stephen Clarkson



Scarlet Pimpernel

Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa* is at the northern limit of its range in The Burrows. We also strangely encountered Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata* in the first slack, a plant more normally associated with wet meadows on acid soils.



often a pimpernel paradise with the Bog, Scarlet and White all growing together. White Pimpernel is a Victorian name for Brookweed and much preferred by Mary who is trying to convert all botanists and laymen to its use. It certainly sounds much nicer than Brookweed.



Bog Pimpernel

I mentioned at the beginning that the Burrows are leased to the MOD and have been used by the military for training purposes for many years. We finished our first day passing by the concrete landing craft which were built in the Second World War so that soldiers could practice disembarking for the D-day landings.

Many thanks to Mary for showing us around the site and sharing her knowledge.

FAY BANKS

Photos: Peter Llewellyn

ONE DAY MEETINGS 2019

EAST QUANTOXHEAD, SOMERSET

12th MAY

Joint meeting with Somerset Rare Plants Group.

Choosing locations for meetings can be surprisingly complicated, and the pressure of *Atlas 2020* recording added another element to the exercise this year. Should one go for under-recorded squares and risk boring those who bother to attend? Should one revisit top rarities? Is there sufficient parking? How difficult is the terrain? The autumn programme-planning season can be quite fraught! The East Quantoxhead area is actually quite well recorded.

My own life in Somerset began here in 1987, when lodgings in the village were my base for the South West Rare Plant Survey, which covered Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall. Life was mostly on the road, but I'd hardly ever been in Somerset and thanks to the WFS seasonal Hunts (my lifelong pleasure and relaxation) I started botanising locally at once. This slice of the coast, between the River Parrett and Blue Anchor and bordering the northern Quantock edges, is mostly highly calcareous, layers of limestone interspersed with clays giving the famous 'stripy' Lias cliffs. The East Quantoxhead Estate also has a remarkable land history, having been Luttrell property for more than seven centuries. Tenanted farms were traditionally managed, with a characteristic pattern of small woods, pasture and arable. Till about the

1990s many of the woods were managed for rough shooting, so kept reasonably clear of brambles and ivy. Recently of course this kind of time-consuming management has been abandoned, but the relict flora has considerable interest, including Rare Plant Register species such as Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*. Summer recording had been done on a stormy day in August 2018, but it was decided to update the spring flora.

Enough members of both societies booked to allow for two parties. Graham Lavender's group headed for some of the eastern woods, while the rest of us spent most of the day in East Wood. This includes a recent plantation of little botanical interest, but the main part of the wood has a much more 'ancient woodland' character and we were very lucky with a perfect sunny day with small birds such as Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers in full song. The wood treated us well from the start, producing one of the target species Goldilocks Buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus* at once – thrilling for me as I had only a shaky memory of seeing it here years ago. Commoner plants (but still notable in this area) such as Woodruff *Galium odoratum* was in lavish flower. After eating our sandwiches sitting in long grass in a clearing, the upper part of the wood was examined, and the field edges surrounding it.

These areas yielded some excellent records for species characteristic of the Lias but not always easy to find. In the wood these included Spurge-laurel *Daphne laureola* and, something completely new and exciting, Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*, which even the Green twins had not previously found here! Two last-year spikes were found, dry and brown of course but identifiable, adding significantly to the sparse VC5 records.



Bird's-nest
Orchid past
its prime

Photo: Liz McDonnell

The field edges were interesting too. Most arable round here is highly intensive now, but the Lias has been corn country since prehistory and some of the threatened weeds still manage to maintain a seed-bank – today one rape field edge had a thick border of thousands of Small-flowered Buttercup *Ranunculus parviflorus* which is nationally scarce but can make lavish appearances in

this area. Returning to the village car park, thinking of cake and scones at the wonderful Chantry Tea Gardens in Kilve, added interest came from a relict grassy bank between wood and arable, which has species such as Common Restharrow *Ononis repens*, Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis* and Hairy Violet *Viola hirta*. A similar relict area was searched by Graham's group as it had old records for the very threatened and declining Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* but sadly only a fragment of good grassland remained with a few plants of Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris* and Pyramidal Orchid *A. pyramidalis*.

Neither group found Greater Butterfly-orchids *Platanthera chlorantha*, though there is possible habitat still unsearched. However Graham's party tackled some critical questions, keying out Smith's Pepperwort *Lepidium heterophyllum*, a very local plant in this area, and even managing to find a hybrid dock, *Rumex x dufftii* (the hybrid between Wood Dock and Broad-leaved Dock) with enough over-wintered fruits still hanging on to allow identification. Another good find (also NOT easy to identify) was *Dryopteris affinis* ssp. *borreri* and Helena Crouch was able to demonstrate its characters. This proved to be a 10K record, but may turn out to be more widespread as local botanical skills improve!

A final treat came during tea itself, as the groups exchanged news of their efforts, when a rather shrivelled fern was spotted in the stone steps of an old barn. This turned out to be a local target species, the Southern Polypody *Polypodium cambricum*.

This fern is restricted to limestone and lime mortar in old walls, so naturally has a very hard time with modern 'tidiness' and repointing. An 1866 herbarium specimen at Kew is labelled 'Between Holford and St Audries', and had tormented me with many unsuccessful searches – but there it was, right in the designated area! A Mediterranean species, it loses its leaves in summer (as it was beginning to in May) but when the

September rain came it produced beautiful clumps of shapely fronds. Keep a lookout! It has a different giz to the ubiquitous Quantock and Exmoor Polypody *P. interjectum* often with shorter fronds, characteristically obviously wider below half way giving a deltate triangular shape. Roofs and walls round Dunster church give a good display to study.

RO FITZGERALD

CHIDDINGSTONE NATURE RESERVE, KENT 8th JUNE

Sixteen Members of the WFS and Surrey Botanical Society met at Chiddingstone Nature Reserve and were warmly greeted by Reserve Manager Stephen Lemon. The reserve is on heavy Wealden Clay and was originally used in the 1850's and 1860's to extract clay to make bricks locally on the site. The reserve therefore has many dips and depressions, some being marshy and others very deep ponds. This created an ideal mosaic of habitats for sedges which were the main focus of this visit.

The first marshy area had good stands of Ragged-Robin *Silene flos-cuculi* with Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and Grey Sedge *Carex divulsa* ssp. *divulsa* in the drier parts. The wetter areas contained Common Marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre* ssp. *palustre*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and Lesser Pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis* (separated from the similar Greater Pond-sedge *C. riparia* by a strongly acute ligule), Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*,

Water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*, with its attractive pink flowers, and Bog Pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius*. Other sedges included the ubiquitous Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Oval Sedge *C. leporina*, Common Yellow-sedge *C. demissa* and Cyperus Sedge *C. pseudocyperus*, along with the cute-looking Bristle Club-rush *Isolepis setacea*. We learned that the Spring-sedge *C. caryophyllea* was confined to the better drainage on ant hills.

In the wooded areas Wild Service-tree *Sorbus torminalis* was present, as was the rather uncommon and charming Wood Club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus*. Ferns included Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, with its numerous scales having a dark central stripe, and Narrow Buckler-fern *D. carthusiana*, with its sparse, pale brown scales. Remote Sedge *C. remota* was common here and also present was the hybrid with False Fox-sedge *C. otrubae* x *C. remota* = *C. x pseudoaxillaris*.

One pond looked stunning as it was completely filled with Fine-leaved Water-dropwort *Oenanthe aquatica* just starting to flower. Other ponds contained Bladderwort *Utricularia australis*. Stephen pointed out the small bladders which catch tiny pond organisms and digest them to supplement its nitrogen intake.

Many members were fascinated by the Pugmill which looked like a giant food mixer. This machine removed debris such as twigs and leaves from the clay and puddled it making it malleable enough to fit into the moulds.

In some parts of the reserve Stephen has placed corrugated iron sheets on the ground to encourage reptiles. We were all very excited to see two

Grass Snakes *Natrix natrix* and even more so when he showed us a family of Slow Worms *Anguis fragilis* complete with tiny youngsters.

In the last section of the woodland we were able to compare Pendulous Sedge *C. pendula*, with its large acute ligules, with the less common Thin-spiked Wood-sedge *C. strigosa*, with its smaller, asymmetrical ligules

Happy and contented despite the almost continuous rain we were all pleased to have recorded at least 14 species of sedge. Very many thanks to Stephen for sharing his vast knowledge of the site and his expert identification of the sedges found there.

GARETH BURNSNALL

ASHBERRY PASTURE 8th JUNE

Ashberry Pasture is a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Reserve in the Upper Rye valley just half a mile from Rievaulx Abbey and three miles from the attractive market town of Helmsley. The upper slopes of the valley are ancient, natural woodland, giving way to limestone grassland on the lower slopes. A crystal clear stream runs through the marshy land and calcareous flushes of the valley bottom.

On June 8th rain was forecast, but, undaunted, some ten of us gathered from as far afield as Teesside, York, and Sheffield. We were of mixed ages and abilities, from relative beginners to accomplished botanists. Judith and Peter Cox were our

leaders. We parked near Ashberry Farm and headed for the gate into the wood behind the farm buildings. Just inside the wood, on the left of the track, was our first rarity, a good stand of Green Hellebore *Helleborus viridis*. Most was in seed but a few late flowers were spotted.

We retraced our steps past several clumps of White Comfrey *Symphytum orientale* and headed up the Old Byland road. The roadside banks yielded plants typical of natural woodland on limestone. Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Spurge Laurel *Daphne laureola*, Woodruff *Galium odoratum* and the delicate Wood Melick *Melica uniflora*. Stone Bramble *Rubus saxatilis*, a plant of hilly

Baneberry

regions of the North and Wales, loves it here but is beginning to take over to the detriment of other woodland floor plants.

A small gate and narrow path on our left led us into Ashberry Pasture. The usual meadow grasses greeted us, along with lime-loving species such as Quaking-grass *Briza media* and Downy Oat-grass *Avenula pubescens*. We couldn't miss the large stands of Lesser Pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*, but it was good to have Roger Martin with us to spot and identify many other less conspicuous sedges.

The marshy grassland yielded Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, a species with the male florets on a different plant to the smaller, tighter, female flowers. Also present were Common Gromwell *Lithospermum officinale*, Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*, Changing Forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor*, Ragged-Robin *Silene flos-cuculi* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*.

Approaching (and crossing) the stream we were treated to a feast of special plants in or by the water and the wet limestone gravel: Bird's-eye Primrose *Primula farinosa*, Butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, Marsh Horsetail *Equisetum palustre*, Marsh Hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa*, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Globe Flower *Trollius europaeus*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris* and Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*. A tiny tributary was full of Fool's-water-cress *Helosciadium nodiflorum* (formerly



Apium nodiflorum) but of greater interest was the Lesser Water-parsnip *Berula erecta*, distinguished from the Fool's-water-cress by a white ring-mark on the petiole below the lowest pair of leaflets.

No WFS June outing is complete without an orchid. We were not disappointed. Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* was flowering on the grass slopes below the woodland fringes and in the valley bottom we found magnificent specimens of Common Spotted-orchid *D. fuchsii* and Early Marsh-orchid *D. incarnata*. Most of the Early Marsh-orchids were salmon-pink but we did find one which was a deep purple-pink. There was evidence of hybridisation.

By this time the rain was setting in. It was definitely not picnic weather, so we reluctantly decided to return to the cars. However there was one extreme rarity still to find. We decided to drive further up the Old Byland Road to the junction with the Tylas Farm track. We were rewarded with ten plants of Baneberry *Actaea*

Photo: Peter Cox



Photo: Peter Cox

Lily-of-the-valley

woodland on limestone south of the moors. To round off a meeting of rich finds we walked a short distance back down the road to admire a large patch of native Lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*.

Our sincere thanks go to Judith and Peter Cox for giving their time and sharing their knowledge and also for introducing us to this beautiful and botanically rich little gem of a reserve. It might be appropriate to mention here that the Wildlife Trusts are reviewing their policies. They must decide whether it is economically viable to manage many small, disparate reserves or whether they should concentrate their resources on fewer, larger reserves. The lease on Ashberry Pasture comes up for renewal in two years time, so Judith has sent a plant list to the YWT to help educate any future decisions.

DOROTHY SILLS

spicata. This plant is only found in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria on limestone pavement or in

RIVER COLNE VALLEY, HILLINGDON 9th JUNE

This was a joint meeting between WFS and the London Natural History Society led by George Hounsom. Fifteen of us met outside West Drayton station and there, in the centre of the car turning circle, we found our first plants, Field Pennycress *Thlaspi arvense*, Viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare* and Eastern Rocket *Sisymbrium orientale*. This set the tone for the meeting. Unexpected and diverse flora popped up all over the place. No chance of thinking this is a wood so it must be something *sylvatica*, or here we are

on a marsh so it must be *palustris*. You needed to keep your thinking cap on. We followed the Grand Union Canal for a time, then the Slough arm of the canal before finally wandering through a wood and some industrial areas. We had the opportunity to test our knowledge of sedges seeing Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*, Lesser Pond-sedge *C. acutiformis*, Cyperus Sedge *C. pseudocyperus* and Greater Tussock-sedge *C. paniculata* followed by our knowledge of roses. Did you know Dog Roses *Rosa canina* have five

sepals, two pinnate, two non-pinnate and one with one side pinnate and one non-pinnate? Water plants included Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, Perfoliate Pondweed *Potamogeton perfoliatus* and Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia* but there were also plenty of pop-up plants - Small Melilot *Melilotus indicus*, Rue-leaved Saxifrage *Saxifraga tridactylites*, Meadow Rue *Thalictrum flavum* and Musk Stork's-bill *Erodium moschatum*.

The group consisted of serious botanists, two people who worked in the laboratories at Kew Gardens, keen beginners and birders with a passing interest in flowers, which all made for an entertaining, sociable, inclusive and interesting meeting. George's patient and learned explanations were much appreciated.

JANET JOHN

SOVEREIGN HARBOUR, EASTBOURNE 19th JUNE

A violent storm on the eve of the meeting didn't bode well for the day itself; would the weather put people off? Not at all! To the leader's astonishment 13 members turned up, keen to explore the varied habitats of Sovereign Park and the fringes of Sovereign Harbour.

After introductions, made for the benefit of new members, outside the Sovereign Centre, a quick detour was made to see Blue Pimpernel *Lysimachia foemina* (formerly *Anagallis arvensis* ssp. *foemina*) growing by an amusement park with masses of Scarlet Pimpernel *L. arvensis* (formerly *A. arvensis* ssp. *arvensis*). The lack of any fully expanded flowers on the former was a disappointment, as it meant the character that best distinguishes it from the latter could not be appreciated – the margins of its petals have fewer hairs which are of a slightly different structure. Having

crossed the road, we made our way to the edge of a large playing field, where we were able to view Dense-flowered Fumitory *Fumaria densiflora*, growing with convenient proximity to plants of Common Fumitory *Fumaria officinalis* ssp. *officinalis*, so that it's shorter, stubbier flowers and broader, more circular sepals were particularly obvious. We then spent a little time exploring a designated picnic area within Sovereign Park itself. Here we saw Crosswort *Cruciata laevipes*, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*, Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare* and Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*. Most of these calcicoles were probably introduced when this bit of the park was first landscaped. The site also contains a very good population of Spear-leaved Willowherb *Epilobium lanceolatum*, which was just coming into flower at the time of our visit.

We proceeded along Prince William Parade, passing typical shingle plants such as Sea Kale *Crambe maritima*, Yellow-horned Poppy *Glaucium flavum*, Sea Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus* and Viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare*, on what is one of the few remaining fragments of 'The Crumbles' – a large area of vegetated shingle which has largely been built on or was excavated when the marina was created. We arrived eventually at a small car park, a little to the west of Langney Point, to admire some sturdy fruiting plants of Greek Dock *Rumex cristatus*, which is also established at the rear of the nearby beach. We crossed the road discreetly to appreciate a plant of Yellow-vetch *Vicia lutea*, which had taken up residence in a flower bed on top of a garden wall, before turning down Atlantic Drive. Here the most interesting plants were on road verges, Small-flowered Crane's-bill *Geranium pusillum* and Corn Parsley *Sison segetum* (formerly *Petroselinum segetum*) being highlights, with scattered Common Broomrape *Orobancha minor* ssp. *minor*. The latter no doubt parasitises various members of the pea and daisy families, although it is difficult to be precise about which ones in most cases. Another feature of these verges, as of the day as a whole, was the great abundance of flowering Rough Clover *Trifolium scabrum*.

We took lunch in a sheltered spot by the marina, exactly where we had just admired an established population of the North American alien Spotted Spurge *Euphorbia maculata*. After lunch, we noted delicate plants of flowering Pale Flax

Linum bienne tucked behind a metal barrier at the eastern end of Atlantic Drive, where it prettifies thinly-grassed waste ground. Further eastwards still, on Harbour Quay, a few members crossed a wooden barrier and climbed a low shingle slope to view Wood Small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos*, where it forms a *Phragmites*-like sward on consolidated shingle in a lower-lying area not quite visible from the road.

The ground immediately to the north of Pacific Drive, our next stop, is the area most changed by recent development. One half of it has disappeared under a new housing estate and the other half was a green and yellow jungle of Hoary Mustard *Hirschfeldia incana*. However, around the edges we saw Bird's-foot Clover *Trifolium ornithopodioides*, which had had a particularly good year, and some far-past-their-best plants of Smith's Pepperwort *Lepidium heterophyllum*. Wall Bedstraw *Galium parisiense* still clings to one small area of bank, Flattened Meadow-grass *Poa compressa* was present in abundance, and Ted Pratt found one plant of the introduced form of Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* var. *sativus*, with the native form growing just a step away for comparison. The former is more robust and upright in habit and has a hollow stem. On a bank very nearby we saw more Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera*, including examples of the local speciality var. *flavescens*, which has very pale pink sepals and a brownish-yellow lip. There is also a very pretty pink-flowered Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* cultivar at this site, which Gareth Bursnall was able to match to 'Cerise Queen' in RHS

literature. Other garden escapes seen in the area included Glaucous Spurge *Euphorbia myrsinites*, Yellow Asphodel *Asphodeline lutea* and a Day-lily self-sown in scrub some distance from the path, which turned out to be Orange Day-lily *Hemerocallis fulva* with large, pale-orange, scentless flowers.

On the beach just to the west of Pevensey bay the diminutive yellow flowers of Small Melilot *Melilotus indicus* delighted, even if they were difficult to spot at first. The Mediterranean grass Rough Dog's-tail *Cynosurus echinatus* was seen in small quantity where the footpath meets the back of the beach (it had been seen in greater numbers back on Pacific Drive) – it has been known in the Eastbourne area since 1949. Round-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium rotundifolium*, one of the "promised" species, was pointed out somewhat sheepishly by the leader much later in the walk than anticipated, by which time some members had had to

leave to begin on long journeys home. Towards the western end of the beach, we were able to spot flowering plants of Orange Mullein *Verbascum phlomoides* from some distance away. Rose Campion *Silene coronaria* and Cabbage-palm *Cordyline australis* were also seen self-sown on the beach here. The last notable plant of the day was Compact Brome *Anisantha madritensis* var. *ciliata*, found by the leader two days earlier, growing in some quantity around the information board covering the extraordinary story of the *SS Barn Hill*. Was the grass introduced accidentally by someone who had stopped to read it?

Thank you to everyone who came on what was probably an over-long walk (I promise to make the next one shorter!) and to Gareth Bursnall and Priscilla Nobbs for supporting a WFS novice on the day.

MATTHEW BERRY

MONK'S WOOD & WOODWALTON FEN, CAMBS. 29th JULY

After squeezing our cars into the roadside car park opposite Monk's Wood, we set off into the woods. We set off initially without one of our leaders, Stephen Clarkson, due to a delay caused by the A14 being closed for the weekend. This was only a brief stop to look at the Crested Cow-wheat *Melampyrum cristatum*. The species was easily found in semi-shaded grassland by the wood. The species is rather attractive and unusual, and several

people spent a while photographing it. We then returned to the cars, identifying Bearded Couch *Elymus caninus* on the way.

Driving round to Woodwalton Fen, we stopped at the nearby centre to have lunch in the scorching heat, which was now in the low 30s. After this we drove to the side of the ditch and then crossed the bridge into the reserve. Here we hurled a grapnel into the ditch to sample the aquatics,

such as Greater Duckweed *Spirodela polyrhiza* and an interesting Lesser Pondweed *Potamogeton pusillus*. Above the ditch there was plenty of Marsh Sow-thistle *Sonchus palustris*, although not yet in flower. In the internal ditches there were the plentiful green round leaves of Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*, and somebody spotted the rather invasive Water Fern *Azolla filiculoides*.

As neither the Fen Violet *Viola stagnina* (formerly *Viola persicifolia*) nor the Fen Wood-rush *Luzula pallescens* had made an appearance this year, our next priority was to look for the Fen Ragwort *Jacobaea paludosa* (formerly *Senecio paludosus*). This should have been easy to spot, but we could not see any. Eventually a non-flowering specimen was found and the conclusion was that we were too early in the season to see this species in its full glory.

From here we walked round amongst the Reeds *Phragmites australis*. There was some gentle coaching from Stephen on some of the grasses such as Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. Further on there was some Water Chickweed *Stellaria aquatica* (formerly *Myosoton aquaticum*) and then, after some careful inspection of leaf prickles, some Fen Bedstraw *Galium uliginosum* was identified. The occasional Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum* was growing by the ditches. A further five minutes looking at leaves in a ditch, identified them as those of Lesser Water-parsnip *Berula erecta*.

Finally, we went looking for Greater Water-parsnip *Sium latifolium*. After ten minutes of looking, one non-flowering plant was found by a ditch. Careful inspection of the bracts confirmed the species. The day finished with a small patch of Yellow Ox-eye *Buphthalmum speciosum* (formerly *Telekia speciosa*).

CHARLES WHITWORTH

BOOK REVIEW

David Johnson. *Wild Orchids of Kent*. 2019. Kent Field Club. Paperback £17.00. ISBN 978-0-956-1926-77

My English teacher, fiercely purist about style, forbade us to use the word 'nice', saying it was weak, over-used, clichéd, but I'm going to break that rule to write about this book because it kept occurring to me as I read. The writing and choice of material is *nice* in the archaic sense of being precise and carefully chosen, and I kept thinking 'Oh, *nicely done*'.

Kent is famous for its wild plants, and has 38 of the possible 55+ orchid species present in Britain and Ireland, but surprisingly it has never had a dedicated orchid flora. These strange plants have produced plenty of literature, but the best-known Kent orchid book, Jocelyn Brooke's *The Military Orchid* (1948) is more a ripping yarn about war and obsession than a flora product.

Recently orchids have been reaching a wide readership through Leif Bersweden's *The Orchid Hunter* (2017), and in Peter Marren's lovely *Chasing the Ghost* (2018) he tips his hat to orchid fascination. However David Johnson's book describes a journey in depth into the science, history and behaviour of orchids in his home county.

The big stars such as the Late Spider-orchid *Ophrys fuciflora* and the Lizard Orchid *Himantoglossum hircinum* are well known, and a species much more widespread in the county, the Lady Orchid *Orchis purpurea* is sometimes called the 'Maid of Kent', but this author's 'epiphany' came from the much commoner Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*. He started out as a birder (and we know from Simon Harrap's excellent *Wild Flowers* how well this leads to critical field botany), becoming fascinated by orchids as a mature naturalist in his 30s. After some years of full-on twitching, he settled into searching and researching close to home and this richly interesting book is the result.

One of the *nice* characteristics of the book is the author's generous acknowledgement of help and inspiration, not just for the support of the Kent Field Club, but, pleasingly for the WFS, he thanks our members Geoffrey Kitchener and the late Eric Philp. I've found particular pleasure and interest in a section he calls 'Kent Orchid Botanologia' – a survey of botanists important to Kent from John Gerard (1545-1612) to Francis Rose (1921-2006). Because of working on obscure rare plants I'm a

bit of a history buff and the brief summaries here are given extra life by excellently chosen illustrations – Edward Jacob's exquisitely curled wig in the 1780s; Robert Pocock's magnificent Lizard Orchid herbarium sheet from the early 19C; a romantic portrait of a décolletée Anne Pratt poring over a leaf picture; Jocelyn Brooke in a belted raincoat, remotely glamorous with cigarette in hand; and of course my own mentor Francis Rose beaming over a huge orchid (and undoubtedly looking forward to an equally splendid lunch). These details give life as well as substance to the book.

There are other good features, such as a riveting essay by Irene Palmer 'The Orchids of Darwin's Downe'. She and her late husband John were long connected with Downe House, where Darwin's work on sexual selection was partly inspired by local Kent orchids, and nobody knows more about this influence on the 'Origin'. There's a gazetteer of 'Orchid-rich sites in Kent' identifying the hot-spots and giving essential information about access (where permitted), parking and what to expect. I'm afraid that orchid fans have a terrible reputation among conservation botanists for, visiting too often, trampling too heavily and selfishly damaging the habitat of the plants they are supposed to love, but this list gives a good spread of the less vulnerable sites and how to approach them. A chapter on 'Variation' shows some bizarre forms and will be deeply fascinating to real orchid nerds!

The accounts themselves are clearly laid out, with a hectad dot map showing records between 1971 and 2016. Each account has close-up and general photographs, the species' recording history in the county, essential references and a great collection of what might be called 'lore'. The book will have uses way outside Kent, as these accounts are often a summary of the state of knowledge about the life of these often mysterious plants. My only regret is specially clear in this section – the photographs throughout the book are well chosen and informative, and would be lovely, but

they have been let down by poor print quality, habitat shots in particular looking dim or unclear.

However the inspiration and education this book will provide more than makes up for this, delighting many botanists wherever they live. It's both sound and enjoyable, so I can end by suggesting a better adjective than the over-used *nice* – I think *winning* is a more worthy term for its achievement and charm!

RO FITZGERALD

OBITUARY

Mornee Button

Gloucestershire members in particular will be saddened to hear that Mornee Button, a loyal and active long-term member of Branch P, died in September after a courageous battle with cancer. She was a PE teacher for most of her career, but a 'nature table' at her primary school had instilled a love of wild flowers and this interest had filled her retirement since 1996. As well as her teaching she had gained Open University environmental qualifications, so her part in local botanical recording was lively and informed.

She was a dream member for a Branch Secretary to 'look after'.

Qualified for the former Valhalla years ago, she chose to remain in her county branch. In this context she was the best of correspondents, sending delightful letters and cards. I never had to nag for her news! Her last letter came in December 2018, bravely listing horrid 'procedures' and conditions endured, but saying 'I shall 'see Christmas' after all!', and telling me of plants in her garden last summer and her pleasure in observing birds and butterflies. It was a privilege to be in touch, for years, with such a courageous and positive person and I believe that it was her passion for nature which guided and defined her. She will be much missed by her botanical friends.

RO FITZGERALD