

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

I write this towards the end of November after an extraordinarily mild autumn. The bulbs are sprouting in my garden and many flowers, both in the garden and in the wild, are still flowering. The flowers and the birds are confused by the unusual climate that does not seem to have the usual rhythm. I also write this towards the end of the Cop 27 meeting in Egypt where the politicians of the world are not going nearly far enough to resolve the cause of climate anomalies here in the UK. It is much worse in many other parts of the world, such as the floods in Pakistan, contrasted with the drought and famine in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Little is being said about climate through the current political crisis in the UK, although I am glad to see that the science budget is intact and that more wind energy is to be encouraged. For the reasonably short-term I think that nuclear energy will be necessary as, it too, is carbon neutral once the plant has been built, so I was glad to see that included in the new budget. We must all help towards bringing about a carbon neutral country and encouraging other countries to do the same. Why do I write about this here in the Wild Flower Magazine? It is because climate anomalies here and elsewhere severely affect the wild flowers that we so much care about.

Some good news on the international field that is dear to my heart is the result of the presidential election in Brazil where Lula da Silva won. Importantly, he will replace a president who has deliberately tried to increase the destruction of the Amazon rainforest and to harm the indigenous people. Although Lula was in jail for corruption after his last time as president, I know that the Amazon rainforest was kept reasonably intact during his term of office. He has promised to halt the destruction and I believe he will try to achieve this difficult task. The loss of the Amazon forest is very relevant to climate change worldwide because each acre that is lost contributes carbon to the atmosphere. Most scientists working on environmental issues believe that, with the deforestation so far, the whole forest is nearing the tipping point that would change the climate so much that the whole region would become savanna rather than forest and thereby make a huge contribution to atmospheric carbon. That is why many of my lectures and writing is about climate change rather than about the plants that I love so much.

GHILLEAN PRANCE

**Copy date for Spring magazine  
1st February 2023**

## EDITORIAL

First, the good news. I am very pleased to say that Ken Southall, ably assisted by Sue Grayston, has agreed to take over the role of Editor of the Wild Flower Magazine from next autumn. I will continue to produce the Spring issue and Peter Llewellyn will be responsible for the Summer issue. I have enjoyed the job and especially the contact I have had with so many of the members. I know I am going to miss all your correspondence. Many thanks for all your copy over the last six years and your words of encouragement.

Priscilla Nobbs has written a short article in this magazine entitled 'Giving back to the Wild Flower Society' and I agree with her sentiments. I have gained so much from being editor and feeling part of the Society. So why not take her up on her challenge?

This issue provides feedback on the very successful AGM at Preston Montford and its accompanying field

meetings. As these meetings occur in the autumn, towards the end of the flowering season, there is often a heavy emphasis on ferns, which are still in spore. This was certainly the case this year with the meeting to Benthall Edge Woods, Ironbridge. Martin Godfrey, who led this meeting, and is a great enthusiast of ferns, discussed growing your own ferns and has kindly produced a guide for inclusion in this issue. There are also reports from meetings that occurred in the middle of the year, with many wonderful finds being described.

Our various hunts continue to be well subscribed and Pauline and Richard Wilson feedback on the Spring Hunt 2022 in this issue. It's always fascinating to see what is still in flower from the previous year and what is flowering early in any particular year. As our President has noted in his letter the flowers are confused by the changes in our climate.

ANNE KELL

## NOTICES

### **The Presidents' Award**

The origins of the 'Presidents' Award' lie in the mid 1990s, when an anonymous donor generously sent £4,000 to fund an annual Award to acknowledge the most useful contribution to the understanding of the flowering plants and ferns of Britain and Ireland through a book, major paper, discovery or outstanding exhibit during that calendar year. The Award is made jointly by WFS and BSBI, chosen alternately by the President of each society. This year it was the turn of the WFS to make the Award at the AGM. As Sir Ghilleen Prance was unable to attend, Peter Llewellyn announced this year's winner who is Prof. A.J. Richards for his *Field Handbook to British and Irish Dandelions*.

### Website -WFS Members' Page

The WFS is adding a password-protected members' page to the WFS website. This will be in the dropdown menu under the 'About' tab. This page will provide a secure space for members to find the emails and postal addresses of Branch secretaries, a downloadable version of the Year Book, AGM minutes and a link to the library of photos submitted by members.

The password will be sent out in the printed Year book and will change annually.



### Greenwall Project at Preston Montford- Mark Duffell

I have been working with Preston Montford in constructing a greenwall containing living plant material to be used by tutors for teaching anything from basic plant ID through to habitats. The first greenwall is aiming to replicate the south Shropshire hills so will consist of a mixture of acid-loving species. This has been part-funded through grants and also donations. Those who attended the AGM at Preston Montford this autumn may have seen the structure designed to support the greenwall.

An article on progress so far can be read in the Shropshire Botanical Society Magazine (Spring 2020). The greenwalls have stalled a bit recently, we did order the plants in March 2020 but then had to cancel them as we had no staffing to support the project. I am hoping to find some time to work with the FSC this autumn (2022) to start planting up the walls and next year to start construction of the second wall.

It would be most helpful if members of the WFS could support the project. We need people to grow, or obtain plant material, for some of the more unusual/hard to obtain species (e.g. plants, seeds, cuttings etc.). If you feel you could help Mark in any way please contact him at [grounds.pm@field-studies-council.org](mailto:grounds.pm@field-studies-council.org)

### Magazine Copy

If you have copy for the Spring or Autumn issues of the magazine please continue to send it to [wfs.magazine@gmail.com](mailto:wfs.magazine@gmail.com), where it will be picked up by either Anne Kell or Ken Southall. However, Peter Llewellyn has kindly offered to edit the Summer issue, so, please can Branch Secretaries send their reports to Peter at [wfs.chair@gmail.com](mailto:wfs.chair@gmail.com) for inclusion in that issue.

### Pamela Lee

We are sorry to hear of the death, on October 5<sup>th</sup>, of Pamela Lee. Pamela, who lived in Surrey, joined WFS in 1990 and was an enthusiastic member of the Society, submitting a Diary every year until 2012 and attending field meetings all over the country.

# WFS MEMBERS' WEEKEND AND AGM

## 2<sup>nd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2022

The Members' Weekend was based near Shrewsbury, with the AGM being held at the Field Studies Council centre at Preston Montford, which also offered accommodation for the weekend for participants.

The Branch Secretaries' meeting was held at the Centre on the Friday and, for those arriving early, there was an opportunity to explore Nover's Hill at All Stretton. Field meetings were also held on the morning before the AGM and on the following Sunday and Monday. Reports on all these meetings can be found on pages 10 to 16.

### AGM

Only the main points of the AGM will be reported here, with full 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, addressed A5 envelope.

Each of the officers of the Society presented their reports.

Robin Blades, our **Treasurer**, reported that the 2021 accounts were circulated with the Summer 2022 Magazine. Subscription income was up and Gift Aid was boosted because we could claim on a large donation made in the previous year. We received a legacy of £500 from Pat Verrall, our former General Secretary. Expenditure included the first 30% of the cost of our new website. Field meeting and travel expense costs increased with the resumption of in-

person activities.

Grant expenditure of £4,350 was again lower than before the pandemic. The Wildlife Trust training events which we support and FSC courses for which we give bursaries to young people had restarted but not yet on the previous scale. We gave the second of five annual grants of £1000 for work monitoring rare plants in Teesdale and a smaller grant for work by Lancaster University on limestone pavements. We supported a publication on the moorland wildlife of the North York Moors in association with the FSC and a film project on Scottish plants.

Total payments exceeded receipts by £483. The value of our investments was 9.6% up on the year.

Membership increased from 659 at 31/12/20 to 695 at 31/12/21 and Sue Poyser was thanked for all her hard work as Membership Secretary.

The meeting approved the adoption of the accounts. Robin thanked Bob Holder for carrying out the independent examination of the 2021 accounts and proposed his re-election. This was agreed.

**Increase in the membership subscription from year ending 31/12/24.** The Executive Committee proposed an increase in membership subscriptions to come into effect in 2024. The proposed increase is to £15 for an adult member with other rates broadly in line with that. Technology has slowed increases in



printing costs but postage costs have increased and subscriptions will not necessarily cover the cost of producing and distributing the Magazine to members. There will also be higher ongoing costs for the new website. While we have significant investments and income from those investments, we would prefer to be able to use these to support our grant-making programme rather than benefits for members. The meeting approved the increases.

**Proposed change to Rule 10 of our Aims and Rules, to ensure that online meetings of the Executive Committee are in accordance with our Rules.** Robin proposed that the following sentence should be added: "Meetings of the Executive Committee may be held in person, online, by telephone or on a hybrid basis." The meeting approved the change.

Anne Kell, our **Magazine Editor**, reiterated that she will be standing down from her role as editor from next year. She will be able to continue to edit the next 3 issues (Autumn 2022, Winter and Spring 2023) but thereafter the Society will require a new editor if the magazine is to continue. (Fortunately, subsequent to the AGM this post has now been filled.)

Anne went on to say that she has edited the magazine for 6 years and she thanked everyone who has contributed to the magazine and helped to sustain an interesting and diverse content over that time. The field meeting reports, Diary records and reports from the different hunts fill the bulk of the magazine, but a

range of other articles and some outstanding keys have helped to broaden the content and interest. With the introduction of the new website, a taster from each magazine is now available to a wider audience to help tempt them to join.

Anne thanked her proof-readers, John Swindells and Sheila Wynn, for doing such a thorough job, Sue Poyser for maintaining and furnishing her with an up-to-date membership list every quarter and to the printers, Printing for Pleasure, for always being on hand to answer queries and producing the magazine on time.

Janet John, our **Meetings Secretary**, reported that we had had:-  
46 field meetings with over 600 booked attendances;  
7 on-line meetings - all well attended and some put on our YouTube channel for further viewing;  
314 people on the list for the WFS Newsletter which gives updates on meetings.

She went on to say that data and engagement is one way of measuring success, but another is the joy and pleasure given. Emails she has received this year from new participants have commented on the friendliness and welcome they have been given which is a signature quality of the WFS.

Janet reported that attendance at Field Meetings has been good with numbers varying between 7 and 20 and she thanked all those people who have stepped forward and volunteered to write a meeting report for the magazine, saying that people do enjoy reading them.

She also said that responses from members to the on-line talks have been encouraging. Several of the talks gave rise to a dialogue and discussion, with a series of emails between participants asking further questions and suggesting further reading or information. Nine of the talks are now on our YouTube channel, so that anyone who hasn't yet seen them can catch up.

Janet said that she intends to continue the online programme in 2023 but reminded us that that relies on people being willing to give a talk. She hoped that there were some potential speakers in the audience and encouraged them by saying, 'Don't be put off by technology – I can help with that and we have people here who can give advice and encouragement.'

She said that her next task is to plan next year's programme. Her aim is to provide field meetings to entice members to travel to places they have not botanised in before or would like to visit again, to provide something new and interesting, to encourage them to get to know other like-minded people, to extend their knowledge and awareness of UK flora, to give a feeling of belonging to the Wild Flower Society as a group..... and yes ... To entertain and give people a 'Grand Day Out'!

The challenges are always finding locations, leaders and the problem that June only has 30 days. Janet said she would be delighted to receive suggestions of locations with a leader that knows the area and with flowers that are at their best in April, May, July or August.

Nichola Hawkins, our **Publicity Secretary**, reported that this year she had made some changes to the Beginner's Diary. These involved updating information and adding some grasses and ferns.

Nichola also said that the WFS T-shirt and a new WFS hoodie were available online.

<https://tinyurl.com/WFSshirt2022>

<https://tinyurl.com/WFShoodie2022>

Sheila Wynn, our **General Secretary**, thanked everyone who had contributed to the weekend's activities. In particular, Stephen Clarkson for the plant quiz, Gareth Bursnall for the plant photo quiz, Ken Southall for the splendid display of the photo competition entries and for organising the 'Shoot and Show' photo competition, John Poland for running the vegetative identification session, Stella Taylor for providing wild flower seeds and Gwyndaf John for being in charge of the book sale.

Sheila announced that unfortunately, due to illness, Jon Drori, the afternoon's speaker, was unable to be there. She thanked him for his generous donation of books to be sold in aid of WFS funds. She also thanked Peter Llewellyn for agreeing, at very short notice, to stand in and provide the afternoon's talk.

She went on to express her gratitude to all the Shropshire Botanists who had offered to either lead or help with the field meetings, thanking especially the leaders of the walks: Martin Godfrey for leading three walks and running the microscope session, Kate Thorne for leading two walks, Sue Dancey for organising

<b>Branch</b>	<b>New Geographical Names 2022</b>
Juniors	Juniors
A	Kent
M	South Coast and Channel Islands
N1	Yorkshire
N2	North East
N3	North West
O	Thames and Chilterns
P	Severn Valley, Mid & South Wales
T	South West
U	Midlands
V	Greater London
W	Scotland & Ireland
Y	East Anglia

Saturday morning's walks and also to John Martin and Mark Duffell. Further thanks went to Ruth Dawes who, although unable to lead a walk, had been a great help in offering suggestions and advice about sites during the planning of the programme.

Sheila again thanked all our Branch and Competition Secretaries for their commitment and generosity in giving their time to the Society, which couldn't function without them. She reported that this year there has just been one change in our Secretaries. Heather Colls has asked to step down from being Autumn Hunt Secretary. Sheila thanked Heather for her work over the last two years and also thanked Jackie Hardy who has agreed to take on the job.

The Executive Committee has been aware for some time that the use of letters as names of our Branches appears to be rather random. They are what remains of a system of branches that was once much more extensive. The Committee felt that the time for a more rational system of names was long overdue and wanted names that were self-explanatory and accessible to new members. During the last year, in consultation with Branch Secretaries, a list of names based on geographical locations has been agreed on (see above). In some cases, these are obvious – Kent, East Anglia, Yorkshire etc. but others proved more problematic, so some are rather approximate. There are two changes to the boundaries of Branches: Cumbria has been moved from Branch N2 to N3 and Ireland has been removed from Branch P and added to Branch W.

Sheila then thanked everyone who had contributed their photos to the online photo library, saying that she had received some splendid images both of plants and members enjoying field meetings, but would welcome more. She asked anyone who would like to share some of their photos to contact her,

Helen Dignum, our **Website Manager**, reported on the website development. Part of the rationale for the new website was that other members of the committee could contribute to it. After a training session from the web design team in early December, Janet quickly created the Field Meeting Events page. Meanwhile Anne uploaded a selection of magazine articles to give a flavour of the society activities, without making the whole magazine available to non-members. Peter Llewellyn made many helpful suggestions and added many extra pictures and slideshows. The website went live on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022, but there was still a fair bit of tweaking to be done after that.

The next step was to enable a website form with an electronic payment system, to allow members to join and pay online. We chose Stripe, as a widely trusted provider. She thanked Sue Poyser for her endless patience and helpful feedback as they improved the form and managed to make the system work. This facility has proved popular, the first new member joined via the electronic form on 14<sup>th</sup> January, three days after the website went live. Since then there have been 85 new members, 70 of these paying electronically.

The website includes Google Analytics which provides website statistics which show, in 90 days: 1,112 unique page views for the home page, 120 views of Join Us and 383 views of the Events page.

It's a sad reflection of the website world that as soon as a webform exists, it is filled with spam. Helen said that she had implemented two kinds of spam blocker which now keeps such things at bay.

Our next development will be a password-protected members' page where we can have contact details for branch secretaries etc. and perhaps the latest magazine. Helen asked for suggestions of what we could usefully include in a protected members' page.

Another part of the website upgrade was the ability for people to sign up to a newsletter, mediated by a commercial newsletter system called Mailchimp, which is free to use for small-scale mailings such as ours. This maintains a confidential and GDPR compliant mailing list, allowing recipients to adjust their email address and unsubscribe. Janet is sending out the newsletter approximately monthly during the main field meeting season to update subscribers of field meeting availability and anything else relevant to our members.

Helen then reported on other online activities. As of 31<sup>st</sup> August, Facebook had 3,400 members who post interesting finds or ask for wild flower ID. Twitter had 2,922 followers and Instagram had 69 posts in total and 238 followers.

Ken Southall, our **Photographic Secretary**, thanked all those who submitted their photographs for this year's competition. His report appears on page 17. Ken clarified the rules stating that the photos do not have to be taken in the year of entry but they must be by a WFS member.

Entries for the Shoot and Show Competition were judged after the AGM.

Peter Llewellyn, our **Chairman**, thanked the members of the Executive Committee for not only carrying out their designated roles but also for taking on extra jobs to keep the society running smoothly and to improve the way we do things. He asked members to give a vote of thanks to Sheila for all her work in organising the AGM weekend.

### **Election to the Executive Committee:**

This year both Roger Heath-Brown and John Swindells retire as General Committee Members. Peter thanked Roger for his contributions to the work of the Committee, saying that as well as being a Branch Secretary, he regularly organised Field Meetings and had helped in the organisation of the 2019 AGM in Oxford. He had also been part of sub-committees including the one working on the development of the new website. John Swindells had been a valued member of the Committee since 2008, for the first ten years as Chairman and the last four years as a General Member, when his knowledge of the working of the Society, as well as its history and rules and regulations, were

invaluable. As a BSBI Committee member he provided a valuable link to that organisation. Peter thanked John for everything he had done and said that he would be missed. Barbara Lewis and Steve Little were elected unopposed to fill the vacancies

### **Date and venue of next meeting:**

The 2023 meeting will be held at The Hub at Rye Hill Community Centre, Rye, East Sussex, on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

### **The Presidents' Award**

As our President, Sir Ghilleen Prance, was unable to attend, Peter Llewellyn announced this year's winner, Prof. A.J. Richards for his *Field Handbook to British and Irish Dandelions*. Prof. Richards was unable to attend and had sent his apologies.

SHEILA WYNN

### **Post meeting**

The meeting was followed by a fascinating talk on Western Australian flora by Peter Llewellyn. This was followed by the Shoot and Show competition, Stephen Clarkson's plant quiz and, a new addition for 2022, a quiz from Gareth Bursnall on parts of plants photographed from unusual angles. So what do you think it is?

Answer at bottom of page 12

Photo: Gareth Bursnall



## WFS AGM and MEMBERS' WEEKEND FIELD MEETINGS, SEPTEMBER 2022

### FRIDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> SEPTEMBER: NOVER'S HILL, ALL STRETTON

A small group of those who had arrived early for the Branch Secretaries' Meeting met in the Batch Valley, All Stretton for a walk onto Nover's Hill on the edge of the Long Mynd, led by Martin Godfrey. As we arrived, the first thing we saw was Gorse in full flower. Closer examination showed that it was Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* which differs from Common Gorse *U. europaeus* in having more golden-yellow flowers, softer and less-ridged spines and tiny (<1mm) bracteoles (tiny leaf-like structures at the base of the flowers).

Along the path we passed Lemon-scented Fern, *Oreopteris limbosperma*, easily identified by its lemon fragrance and the arrangement of the sori round the edge of the pinnae.

We slowly ascended the hill, with frequent stops to admire the views across the valley to Wenlock Edge. Our aim was to visit a flushed, boggy area on the top of the hill. The site is important as it is one of the six known sites in the UK for the rare liverwort *Biantheridium undulfolium*, which grows on *Sphagnum* spp., but we didn't expect to find any sign of it in the desiccated conditions.

Group inspecting the 'flush' on the top of Nover's Hill



Photo: Anne Kell



As expected, the ground was more like concrete than bog on this occasion, but we found some very much reduced leaves of various wetland species, including tiny plants, which after some debate were identified as Mudwort *Limosella aquatica*, Shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* and Water-purslane *Lythrum portula*. After spending some time looking around, we retraced our steps. Thanks to Martin for showing us this interesting site.

SHEILA WYNN

## **SATURDAY 3<sup>rd</sup> SEPTEMBER: THE GROUNDS OF PRESTON MONTFORD FIELD STUDIES CENTRE**

We met in the courtyard and divided into three groups. The leaders were Sue Dancey, Mark Duffell, Martin Godfrey, Roger Heath-Brown, Gareth Bursnall and Stephen Clarkson. In the orchard hedgerow we saw and tasted red and yellow Cherry Plums *Prunus cerasifera* and round, black Bullace. Bullace and the more elongate Damson, which we saw later, are varieties of *P. domestica* ssp. *insititia*. In winter, thorny *Prunus* species including Cherry Plum can be distinguished from Hawthorns *Crataegus* spp. by the bud arrangement – those of *Prunus* are along the thorn and those of *Crataegus* at its base.

Field Pond was dominated by Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* and New Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii*. Some New Zealand Pigmyweed had been removed and piled on the bank; it is hoped that a biocontrol soon to come

on the market, a mite *Aculus crassulae*, will prove effective. We examined the hinge between the petiole and leaf blade of Broad-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton natans* which allows the leaf to remain flat on the surface when water levels change. Near the reeds we saw Cyperus Sedge *Carex pseudocyperus* with 'Stickle Brick'-like fruit and Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, which derives its name from its use in darkening skin to make fortune-tellers appear more exotic. On one Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus* inflorescence we saw a leafy growth, a gall caused by the jumping plant louse *Livia juncorum*. In short vegetation on the bank of the pond we found Bristle Club-rush *Isolepis setacea*, Common Yellow-sedge *Carex demissa* and Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea*.

At Old Orchard Pond we saw Inland Club-rush *Bolboschoenus laticarpus*, which has fruits on long rays unlike Sea Club-rush *B. maritimus* on which the fruits are bunched at the top of the stem. In another pond, Galingale *Cyperus longus* had been planted and was fruiting. We then came to a Black Walnut tree *Juglans nigra* in fruit. We observed the scent and the toothed leaves. Walnut juice is another skin-darkening agent.

Next we descended a sloping path near the River Severn to see Meadow Saffron *Colchicum autumnale* flowering in the woods. Returning to the centre we saw *Cornus sanguinea* ssp. *australis*, often planted but non-native, which can be recognised by its medifixed hairs and, growing in a lawn, a mature Wild Service-tree *Sorbus*



*torminalis* with fruit and green pea-sized leaf buds.

It was an enjoyable and informative field meeting. Thanks to everyone for sharing their expertise.

JANE LOWE

## **SUNDAY 4<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER: LLANYMYNECH ROCKS NATURE RESERVE**

The Llanymynech quarries and the Montgomery Canal were one of the more notable quarrying entities of the Industrial Revolution. Today, the quarries are first-rate limestone habitats with some 350 known naturalised plants, whilst the unused canal too has an abundant flora.

On a warm, sunny day, we had a hilly trek around the quarries and the immense central rock amphitheatre, culminating in a sun-drenched lunch at a splendid belvedere giving views north along the Marches to the Breidden Hills.

Spread over a large, hilly site, the quarry flora is typical of the Llangollen karst, best in areas that have been kept clear by the local Wildlife Trust conservation management or are naturally sparsely vegetated, including quarry scree and tailings. The site was expectedly very dry, for instance, with many specimens of Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* clearly depauperate, whilst others were still flowering, as were stunted patches of Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, coming as something of a surprise to those of us used to the parched southern chalk. On such an extensive site, vegetation parcels itself out, for

instance, Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and Salad Burnet *Poterium sanguisorba* ssp. *sanguisorba* in remarkably discrete patches. Like so many quarries and delves near urban areas, the site is good for cotoneasters - we saw a big Hollyberry Cotoneaster *C. bullatus*; flat combs of Wall *C. horizontalis*, and a leggy Himalayan *C. simondsii*, plus a well-armed invader, Mrs Wilson's Barberry *Berberis wilsoniae*. The quarry steeps and crags are known for very localised whitebeam *Sorbus* species, with much work done here by Tim Rich, but we'd have needed full climbing gear to get to them!

The highlight was surely the few patches of the often-shy Autumn Lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis*, the recent wetness perhaps having coaxed them out. Also lovely to see, Blue Fleabane *Erigeron acris*, the bright flowers of Common Calamint *Clinopodium ascendens* and wee green buds of Autumn Gentian or Felwort *Gentianella amarella* ssp. *amarella* rising from small, empurpled plants. Gone over but noteworthy were Hairy Rock-cress *Arabis hirsuta*, some of those wonderfully hairy leaves still visible, and the loose, odourless, dun seed-heads of Wild Onion or Crow Garlic *Allium vineale*. Mark Duffell reported on an old Staffordshire woman calling the on-site Quaking Grass *Briza media* 'titter-totters'—which really sums it up. Thanks to John Martin for leading the walk.

BOB CONNELL

Answer - Woolly Thistle



Martin Godfrey using the grapnel on the Montgomery Canal

Photo: Ken Southall

## WERN CLAYPIT RESERVE AND CANAL, ARDLEEN AND BUTTINGTON WHARF, WELSHPOOL

The Montgomery Canal fell into disrepair and became disused in the 1930s when it gradually developed into one of the UK's best wildlife sites.

Wern Claypit Nature Reserve is one of a series of reserves created alongside the canal to compensate for any impact on biodiversity caused by canal reconstruction work and subsequent boat traffic. The reserve creates the environmental conditions of a disused canal. Floating Waterplantain *Luronium natans* and, another nationally scarce species, Grass-wrack Pondweed *Potamogeton compressus* have been transplanted here from the main canal in the hope that they will go on to colonise other parts of the reserve.

Our aim was to explore the wetland habitat on the opposite bank of the canal but first we had a look at the

tow path verges where we were pleased to see Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* and other favourites. We noted that Water-soldier *Stratiotes aloides* is the dominant plant in this part of the canal and a potential problem if not carefully managed. Our guide for the day, Kate Thorne, pointed out that it seems to prefer full sun and this enables Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* to thrive in the more shaded areas.

We set off with Kate and her friend Sue (both experts on the botany of the local area) to a field adjacent to the canal where the accommodating owners had moved their horses out and tethered their watchful billy goat in the polytunnel for our visit. We were free to roam in the tall vegetation of the field but were halted towards the canal bank where it got decidedly squelchy. Our wellie-clad leaders did the honours by wading in the long vegetation to find as many interesting plants as they could muster. There was Cyperus Sedge *Carex pseudocyperus*, Bladder

Sedge *C. vesicaria* and Hairy Sedge *C. hirta*; Fine-leaved Water-dropwort *Oenanthe aquatica*, Hemlock Water-dropwort *O. crocata* and Tubular Water-dropwort *O. fistulosa* plus Marsh Stitchwort *Stellaria palustris* in its only known location in Montgomeryshire.

Back on the towpath we spotted the long, narrow leaves of Fen Nettle *Urtica dioica* ssp. *galeopsifolia* and we did the touch test to prove that it doesn't sting but, be warned, Common Nettle *U. dioica* ssp. *dioica* may be lurking in the foliage (the voice of experience!). Kate used a grapnel to give us a close look at Unbranched Bur-reed *Sparganium emersum*. Then there was a change of focus when we admired a pike *Esox lucius* hiding in the canal vegetation quietly in wait for its prey and some freshwater sponge *Spongilla lacustris* growing on the bridge wall just below the water surface. After lunch we visited the towpath near Buttington Wharf where Kate located Floating Water-plantain *L. natans* and we were able to examine the leaves at close range. Many thanks to Kate and Sue, our dedicated leaders who went out of their way to make sure that this was a rewarding and enjoyable excursion for everyone.

SHEENA PATERSON

## MONTGOMERY CANAL AND VYRNWY AQUEDUCT, LLANMYNECH

After a damp start the group set off along the canal in dry weather and walked briskly to a bridge and lock where the botanising started. Black

Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus* and Hart's-tongue Fern *A. scolopendrium* were seen growing on the brick walls. The surface of the canal had a good population of Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*. Using a grapnel our leader, Martin Godfrey, fished several plants out of the water. These included: Common Duckweed *Lemna minor*, Ivy-leaved Duckweed *L. trisulca*, Nuttall's Waterweed, *Elodea nuttallii* and Fool's-water-cress *Helosciadium nodiflorum*.

Photos: Anne Kell



Long-stalked Pondweed

The walk back along the canal yielded Square-stalked Willowherb *Epilobium tetragonum* and, at the water's edge, Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*. There was much discussion as to the identity of pondweeds with the decision made (and later confirmed) that there were specimens of Blunt-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton obtusifolius* and Long-stalked Pondweed *P. praelongus* present. Another duckweed was found after lunch, Greater Duckweed *Spirodella polyrhiza*.

We crossed over the aqueduct, now dry, and looked down onto the River Vyrnwy, a tributary of the River Severn.

At the water's edge we saw Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, with its characteristic hollow stem and the large, attractive leaves of Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*.

Towards the end of the walk Martin found one specimen of Floating Water-plantain *Luronium natans*. It was carefully returned to the water after examination. Apparently, the swans, a family of seven, are inclined to graze on these plants.

It was a very pleasant, not too strenuous, day with the added benefit that being by the water the plants hadn't suffered too much from the recent high temperatures and lack of rain. Thanks to Martin for leading the walk.

BARBARA LEWIS

## MONDAY 5<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER: BENTHALL EDGE WOODS FROM IRONBRIDGE

We gathered our 19 strong party along with our leader, Martin Godfrey and set off along the path above the River Severn stopping along the way to look at the wonderful ferns growing in the shade of the trees. After showing us the differences between Male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, Scaly Male-fern *D. affinis* agg., Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina* and Broad Buckler-fern *D. dilatata*, Martin explained all about their method of reproduction which differs from flowering plants in that ferns produce spores. More details on their method



Blunt-leaved  
Pondweed

of reproduction can be found on page 22.

Some ferns, such as those in the *D. affinis* group, produce a prothallus which directly produces a frond; however, it also produces sperm which can form a hybrid fern with Male-fern *D. filix-mas*. This accounts for the extreme variability of this group.

We climbed up through the woodland to a small limestone quarry where we were shown some hybrid ferns including one between a Soft Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* and a Hard Shield-fern *P. aculeatum*. Martin offered to show us how to grow our own ferns and several people took some spores home to give it a try. (See centre page spread for instructions.) My own are in jam jars on my table. I'll let you know how they get on. On the way we came across a patch of fern that had been galled which was something I hadn't seen before. It was a very interesting and informative day out that has piqued my interest still further in these fascinating plants. A big thank you to Martin Godfrey for sharing his knowledge of ferns.

SUE GRAYSTON



## BENTHALL EDGE WOODS FROM BENTHALL HALL

Nick Swankie, the Gardener in Charge at Benthall Hall, gave an introduction to the site. The National Trust looks after all but the farm. Nick explained that a lot of the ash trees suffering dieback were being cleared and tracks widened. This results in ground disturbance and species recording needs updating.

We started out with our leader, Kate Thorne, past the house garden displaying the rose, "Jubilee" and noted the Bog Myrtle *Myrica gale* and the pond with Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*. The English Elm *Ulmus procera* could be distinguished from the nearby Wych Elm *U. glabra* by the corkiness along the stems.

As we walked along the track looking at Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus* we realised all have opposite leaves. The Dogwood has red stems, the Spindle green.

In the wood, we noted Woodruff *Galium odoratum*, an Ancient Woodland Indicator (AWI), Hairy St John's-wort *Hypericum hirsutum* with a round stem, Spurge-laurel *Daphne laureola*, Common Gromwell *Lithospermum officinale* and Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, another AWI, with beautiful leaves.

Frances and Frank Hay, members of Shropshire Botanical Society and volunteers at Benthall Hall had joined our walk and Frank was able to fill us in on the geology of the area which has a limestone quarry, Patten's

Quarry, that he pointed out over the other side of valley. There was a lot of Yew *Taxus baccata* which is indicative of limestone.

We made a detour to see the four Wild Service-trees *Sorbus torminalis*, another AWI, remembering we had seen one at Preston Montford on our first AGM day. We noted the chequered bark. The pubs called Chequers were so called because they had a Wild Service-tree outside.

Walking back, we passed a Nettle-leaved Bellflower *Campanula trachelium* in flower.

So, down to the pond, a wet area, though there was not much mud at the end of such a dry summer. As it got softer, we inhaled the scent of the Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*.

Kate compared a couple of St John's-worts including the Square-stemmed St John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum* with very small flowers. Then she explained the features of the Hoary Ragwort *Jacobaea erucifolia*, saying that the inflorescences were not as crowded as in Common Ragwort *J. vulgaris* and the leaves were revolute, or rolled under at the edges.

We looked at the terrestrial form of Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia*. This species, evidently, can also grow in water and wetlands. Kate pointed out the very erect Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* with hollow stems.

Perhaps the highlight of the walk was seeing Water-violet *Hottonia palustris*. It was a very informative



Photo: Jane Lowe

Winning image from 'Shoot and Show' competition.  
Hog's Fennel at Tankerton

walk, all the better for having instances of two species for comparison. I couldn't follow and take in everything, but I greatly enjoyed

sharing my interests with other similar-minded people and hope to attend more meetings.

JOYCE BARRUS

## PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2022: RESULTS

After the recent absences of the annual Photographic Competition, it was a pleasure, once again, to see its return this year. There were no less than 94 entries from 12 entrants and my thanks go to them for their submissions. Two Wild Flower Society members, Carol Hawkins and Enid Barrie, took on the onerous task of judging for which I pass on my grateful thanks. Every entry this year was submitted electronically and all were received by me through the internet. I had virtually no trouble at all in receiving them and I was able to take my computer equipment to one of the judge's houses for them to make their selections. I envisage this will be the normal way of sending in

pictures for the competition in the future. Congratulations to Sue Grayston for her winning picture, gaining the overall best in show and receiving the Violet Schwerdt Trophy. See her picture reproduced on the rear cover of this magazine.

The 'Shoot and Show' class this year was won by Jane Lowe who received the donated prize of semi-precious tumbled stones in a wooden bowl. There were 36 entries this year and they made a very interesting display for those members attending the AGM to make their choices. Thanks to everyone who brought their photos along.

KEN SOUTHALL



Photographic  
Competition

2<sup>nd</sup> in Class 3  
Close-up

Lizard Orchid

### Class 1 Habitat:

1 <sup>st</sup>	Stephen Clarkson	The vast stretch of shingle at Dungeness, Kent
2 <sup>nd</sup>	David Caals	Dark-red Helleborine <i>Epipactis atrorubens</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Dennis Kell	Wall-rue <i>Asplenium ruta-muraria</i> , Maidenhair Spleenwort <i>Asplenium trichomanes</i> and Hart's-tongue <i>A. scolopendrium</i>
H/C	Sue Grayston	Koch's Gentian <i>Gentiana acaulis</i>

### Class 2 Plant Portrait:

1 <sup>st</sup>	Ed Dolphin	Dodder <i>Cuscuta epithymum</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Stephen Clarkson	Wood Bitter-vetch <i>Vicia orobus</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sue Grayston	Creeping Lady's-tresses <i>Goodyera repens</i>
H/C	Gary Hillier	Woolly Hawkweed <i>Hieracium lanatum</i>

### Class 3 Close-up:

1 <sup>st</sup>	Janet John	Late Spider-orchid <i>Ophrys fuciflora</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Alli Singleton	Lizard Orchid <i>Himantoglossum hircinum</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Dennis Kell	Greater Yellow-rattle <i>Rhinanthus angustifolius</i>
H/C	Sue Grayston	One-flowered Wintergreen <i>Moneses uniflora</i>

### Class 4 Foreign Fields:

1 <sup>st</sup>	Sue Grayston	Pink Cinquefoil <i>Potentilla nitida</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sue Grayston	Alpine Aster <i>Aster alpinus</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Stephen Clarkson	Amphibious Bistort <i>Persicaria amphibia</i>
H/C	Dennis Kell	Common Scurvygrass <i>Cochlearia officinalis</i>

### Class 5 Human Element:

1 <sup>st</sup>	Janet John	A riveting discourse on climate change effects on stomatal density.
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Stephen Clarkson	"I know there's something in there"
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Anne Kell	"Let me read you a story"
H/C	Gary Hillier	"Yep...it's definitely grass!"



# GIVING BACK TO THE WILD FLOWER SOCIETY

## JOIN THE COMMITTEE? “Not enough time!”

During the first WFS AGM at Preston Montford I was asked to join the Executive Committee. “Can’t possibly”, I thought “I’m too busy!”. I spoke to Derek and Lorna Holland and they encouraged me. “It is only for four years, three times a year, your fare is paid and you learn such a lot”. I realised I had gained so much from being a member of WFS and it was one way of ‘giving back’.

## LEAD A WALK? “Not a good enough botanist!”

I had the courage to lead a walk in Kent after I had been on a similar one with Kent Wildlife Trust. If you go on an interesting walk with a local society use it to share with others. A walk doesn’t have to have rare flowers, just interesting habitats that you have found enjoyable. Make them ‘Come and Find’ events. Often experienced botanists come who will share their knowledge. My 2022 North Denes, Great Yarmouth walk was a repeat of the BSBI 2021 one. The Beccles Marsh Trail was one I had previously done years’ ago with Suffolk Wildlife Trust. I only remembered Water-soldier *Stratiotes aloides* but what a wealth of flowers we found in 2022 (plus the third record of Small-flowered Winter-cress *Barbarea stricta* in Suffolk). Don’t get upset if few people book for your walk – only three booked for my first walk. This was much easier to manage as I was not overwhelmed by numbers. In 2013 I suddenly found myself

responsible for WFS walks the following year and I pleaded for help at the AGM. Pauline Wilson, Jan Armishaw and Derek and Lorna offered walks. No-one booked for Derek and Lorna’s Hothfield Heathlands walk although they had helped the previous day with Jan’s at Ranscombe Farm. Unfortunately, another walk with arable plants had been inserted between the two events. I learned the hard way to make sure such walks were flagged up together as two-day meetings. Thank you letters are really appreciated. David Albon emailed: ‘I have been meaning to get in touch to thank you very much for your Norfolk days! I thoroughly enjoyed them and thought they were three very varied but plant-rich sites in lovely locations and with an excellent group! This bucked me up tremendously!’

## WRITE A REPORT? “Can’t possibly!”

Gareth Bursnall and I used to write our own reports, hating having to ask others. One day Anne Kell said: “It is good to get a different perspective” and found someone else to write about Gareth’s walk. Now I ask at the start of the walk – what a difference it makes to me when someone offers! Anne has said, “Not long, mention numbers present, habitat and anything on the walk that gave you pleasure.” It is NOT easy for some of us who struggle to put words together but that “Yes, I’ll try” is a huge encouragement to the leader who has spent a lot of time arranging a walk. Now I try to offer to

write a report at least once during the year.

written reports. The Society is all the richer for it.

So many thanks to those who have joined the Committee, led walks and

PRISCILLA NOBBS

## ONE DAY MEETING BRANDON REACH AND BRANDON MARSH 20<sup>th</sup> JUNE

With WFS numbers swelled by members of the Warwickshire Flora Group, the first plant stop was just forty yards from the Visitor Centre. Tiny Wall Bedstraw *Galium parisiense* was seen growing on the sandy grassland and discussions about prickly directions were heard as we consulted the key in Rose. We then continued down the drive to enter Brandon Reach on the north side of the road. In the woodland glades we had a chance to compare the fruits of Field Penny-cress *Thlaspi arvense* with the much taller Smith's Pepperwort *Lepidium heterophyllum*. Unfortunately, the dry weather meant that the expected Heath Dog-violet *Viola canina* was not seen in flower.

After a gentle ramble through two-metre-tall Fragrant Agrimony *Agrimonia procera* (some of us actually able to detect its faint lemon smell), we returned along the drive to the visitor centre. Here there were many plants of three invasive, introduced St John's-worts: Tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum*, Rose-of-Sharon *H. calycinum* and Tall Tutsan *H. x inodorum*, which had us looking in our books again.

After lunch in the cafe, sandwiches in the courtyard, or in some cases a bit of both, we carried on to Brandon Marsh. Walking past, but not ignoring the handsome, branched Hungarian Mullein *Verbascum speciosum*, we continued to an area of dry grassland with some fairly large Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus* and the dried remains of Silver Hair-grass *Aira caryophyllea*. Walking through the marsh we compared *Carex* species and a nice surprise near the end of the visit was the pink form of Hedge Bindweed with the ridiculously long name in Stace of *Calystegia sepium* ssp. *sepium* f. *colorata*. An enjoyable day spent looking at a variety of plants was had by all. I suppose that is what it is all about really.

JOHN WALTON



Rose-of-Sharon



Photo: Anne Kell



# GROWING FERNS FROM SPORES

## by MARTIN GODFREY

As well as being attractive plants for the garden or potted in the house, ferns have an unusual life cycle which makes them fascinating to grow from scratch. Unlike flowering plants, which produce seeds from which new plants grow directly, ferns produce spores which germinate to produce an intermediate gametophyte generation, known as the prothallus. These are effectively tiny, and usually short lived, independent plants which, given the right conditions, produce eggs and sperm which fertilize to produce the sporophyte generation – the large fern which we see in the wild. Interestingly some ferns, like Killarney Fern *Trichomanes speciosum* can live solely as a gametophyte, only rarely producing the sporophyte fronds.

First find your spores. The large fern fronds we are all familiar with produce their spores on the underside of the leaf pinnae in sporangia (Fig. 1). The spores usually ripen in late summer, they become dark-coloured and the sporangia open to release them. Collection is easy – just take two or three pinnae off the fern frond and put them in a paper packet. Leave overnight somewhere warm and dry and in the morning you will see that they have shed a fine blackish dust which is the spores.

Fig. 1

Sporangia  
on the  
underside  
of a fern  
frond



Plant your spores. To germinate and grow into prothalli the spores need moisture and light. I put a thin layer of well-moistened potting compost in a jar and thinly sprinkle the spores over it – the spores are so fine and light. Pick up a little of the “dust” on the end of a knife to do this. Screw the lid onto your jar – this will keep the moisture in, any evaporation will condense and run back down the sides of the jar. Don’t forget to label and date your jar (Fig. 2). The prothalli cannot take direct sunlight so put your pot on a north-facing windowsill where it can get plenty of light and leave. It can take several weeks or even months for the spores to germinate.

Fig. 2

Jar ready  
for the  
spores.



Grow the prothalli. Eventually as the spores germinate you will see a film of green spread over the potting compost. The germinated spores will grow into little filmy plates of tissue 1 or two cells thick – the prothalli, Fig. 3.

Fig. 3

Growing  
prothalli.



Fertilization. The well-grown prothalli will produce male and female reproductive organs, typically on their underside. The male organs will release sperm which will swim through the moisture in the pot to fertilize the eggs in the female organs. The fertilized egg will grow into an immature sporophyte, Fig. 4. Typically you will get several to a pot.

Fig. 4

Immature  
sporophyte.



Prick out your sporophyte. Once the sporophytes get big enough to handle they will need to be pricked out into a pot to grow on. Fill a small pot with well-moistened potting compost and remove three or four sporophytes from your jar – a pair of forceps is best for this – and plant in the compost. The sporophytes are still quite fragile and need to be kept on a north facing windowsill and sprayed with water regularly to keep moist, Fig. 5.

Fig. 5

Pricked out  
sporophytes.



Enjoy your plants. When your ferns have grown to a reasonable size, some will probably die as well, plant out into a large pot and allow to grow. Split and replot the plants if they get too big. Native plants will grow well in your garden. The plants in Fig. 6 are around five years old.



Fig. 6. *Dryopteris x complexa* from spores.

## SPRING WEEK HUNT 2022

		Total
Ian Green	Highlands/Moray	40
Helen Jackson	Midlothian/E. Lothian	41
Barbara Allen	Merseyside	45
Rita & Anthony Grainger	Leeds	56
Christina White	Northamptonshire	33
Susan Grimshaw	Berkshire	34
Sue Kightly & Diana Stroud	Berkshire	66
Barbara Mathews	Suffolk	55
Ron Parker	Surrey/E. London	43
Pippa Hyde	Surrey	68
Priscilla Nobbs	Surrey	31
Margot Birkbeck & Georgina Hopkins	Kent	31
Sue Poyser & Doug Grant	Kent	62
John Swindells	East London	49
Jackie Hardy	Worcestershire	68
Nicki Mottram	Warwickshire	62
Sarah Beetham	Bristol area	48
Monica Davies	Bristol area	31
Pauline & Richard Wilson	Bristol area	29
Sally Maller	South Devon	72
Total number of different species seen		237
Species only found by one person		96
Not found in recent years Toothwort <i>Lathraea squamaria</i>		

It starts to make interesting reading now that we have compiled the Spring Hunt for 5 years. The flowering plants seen by almost everyone vary very little from year to year and number about 20. However this year Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* made it to this list.

Plants seen by one person usually number around 100, but from year to year the species change quite a lot. This of course depends on who

sends in a list. Some unusual plants feature every year because they grow near a recorder, but no one else finds them.

Other plants are on the cusp of flowering. No one found Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* this year and only one person found Ramsons *Allium ursinum* but that was in South Devon. This year more species of *Veronica* were found than usual. There were fewer reports of trees in flower than in previous years.



So, a few notes on this year's findings:-

**Ian Green** was not able to get out much, but spotted Alpine Squill *Scilla bifolia*. The first time he had seen it in Moray.

**Helen Jackson** was able to look more widely with the use of a car. A good find was Lesser Chickweed *Stellaria pallida* but her greatest surprise was to find a single plant of Oil-Seed Rape *Brassica napus* ssp. *oleifera* by the river.

**Barbara Allen** found all her plants near home. Field Woodrush *Luzula campestris* was flowering very early. She noted that Common Whitlowgrass *Erophila verna* was all over the place. Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* eluded her and most other people.

**Rita and Anthony Grainger** described having a Blackthorn Spring at last. Spotted Dead-nettle *Lamium maculatum* was new for their hunt, not native but gets everywhere. They also found Sulphur Cinquefoil *Potentilla recta* which seems to pop up casually and is quite striking to see.

**Christina White** found more flowering plants than last year. It's not often that grasses are included, but Meadow Barley *Hordeum secalinum* was seen and she also found Sticky Groundsel *Senecio viscosus*.

**Susan Grimshaw** found Annual Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis muralis* and Early Dog-violet *Viola reichenbachiana* both only found by a couple of other people.

**Sue Kightly and Diana Stroud** found three common plants in flower. Common Stork's-bill *Erodium cicutarium*, Black Medick *Medicago lupulina* and Grey Field-speedwell *Veronica polita*. Small-flowered

Crane's-bill *Geranium pusillum* is a less commonly found plant.

**Barbara Matthews** was surprised about the plants she didn't see flowering despite a mild winter, but having had much rain and wind. Common Cudweed *Filago vulgaris*, White Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria capreolata* and Clary *Salvia verbenaca* were all good finds.

**Ron Parker** found four plants on the edge of their flowering time: Beaked Hawk's-beard *Crepis vesicaria*, Wild Cherry *Prunus avium*, Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius* and Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*.

**Pippa Hyde** had not found Ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea* before on her Spring Hunt. A fallen tree revealed flowering Mistletoe *Viscum album* at viewing level. Red Clover *Trifolium pratense* and Guernsey Fleabane *Erigeron sumatrensis* were other good finds.

**Priscilla Nobbs** did the same local walk she does for the Autumn Hunt. Hedgerow Crane's-bill *Geranium pyrenaicum* and Musk Stork's-bill *Erodium moschatum* were good finds.

**Margot Birkbeck and Georgina Hopkins** hunted together. Margot was very surprised to find Giant Butterbur *Petasites japonicus* growing on the allotment. Hope it doesn't spread! Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* is another plant on the cusp of flowering at this time.

**Sue Poyser and Doug Grant** were pleased to find Wood Anemones *Anemone nemorosa* and carpets of Coltsfoot *Tussilago farfara* in a place not noticed before. No one else reported seeing Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*.

**John Swindells** reported Musk Stork's-bill *Erodium moschatum* saying it can be found now most months of the year. Chinese Mustard *Brassica juncea* was a first for him. Shaggy-soldier *Galinsoga quadriradiata* is very much a London speciality. Hawkweed Oxtongue *Picris hieracioides* was an early find. **Jackie Hardy** made her main search in The Licky Hills and Bredon Hill, but also visited relatives in East Devon. Larch *Larix decidua* was just one of a list of trees. Only one other person found Red Campion *Silene dioica*, another plant on the cusp.

**Nicki Mottram** doubled the number of flowers seen from her first year. Was it more experience or weather conditions? Out with Warwickshire Flora Group she saw Green Hellebore *Helleborus viridis*. Nipplewort *Lapsana communis* was a good find.

**Sarah Beetham** once again found an early Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*. Fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris* is expanding in its site. That and Slender Speedwell *Veronica filiformis* are very early finds.

**Richard and Pauline Wilson** found two flowering heads of Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* in a wood full of plants. Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* was not flowering then, but we have seen huge swathes of it on our walks this spring.

**Caroline Bateman** said half her records were spring flowers, the rest left-overs and many are escapes. Perennial Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis tenuifolia* and Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* were sole finds. Elm *Ulmus* agg. is rarely reported.



**Sally Maller** found a number of plants flowering early, probably reflecting her southerly home. Among them Ransoms *Allium ursinum*, Shining Crane's-bill *Geranium lucidum*, Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber* and Rough Chervil *Chaerophyllum temulum* are just a few.

Thank you very much for your interesting news and very well presented lists.

Some of you braved the elements and I hope all enjoyed your finds.

PAULINE AND RICHARD WILSON

Photo: Richard Wilson

## FIELD MEETINGS 2022

### WILTSHIRE AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> JUNE

On a sunny day during the mid-June Covid surge, just six of us met at Morningside Meadows. Richard Gosnell, a long-standing volunteer on the site, told us about its history. The hay meadows had always been farmed but without fertilisers. They were purchased by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in 2019. A restored section of the Wilts and Berks canal runs through the site.

On the way to the hay meadows we saw Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* and Hard Rush *J. inflexus*. Stephen Clarkson showed us how to distinguish between them by looking at their pith, Soft Rush having continuous pith while Hard Rush has interrupted pith. In the meadows we found Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, Pepper-saxifrage *Silene acaulis*, Chalk Knapweed *Centaurea debeauxii* and Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* in flower with Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* in bud. At the canal, in which Roach were swimming, we saw Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and False Fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*. We could hear Cuckoo and Whitethroat. At lunchtime, we drove on to Barbury Castle, an ancient hillfort on the Ridgeway Path with unusual visitor facilities – nesting swallows in the ladies' toilets! There were Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, Squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota* and Pignut

*Conopodium majus*. We sighted a mysterious purple cushion the other side of a big dip which turned out to be Wild Thyme *Thymus drucei* growing on an anthill. We also saw a Small Elephant Hawk-moth *Deilephila porcellus* and numerous Common Blue butterflies *Polyommatus icarus*.

The following day a slightly larger group met at Lower Moor Farm Reserve. In the Clattinger Farm meadows we had visited in April 2021 we found Fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris* and Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* seed heads and, in flower, Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Southern Marsh-orchids *D. praetermissa* and a very tall plant with intermediate characteristics, possibly their hybrid *D. x grandis*. We also saw Burnt Orchids *Neotinea ustulata*, Common Twayblade *Neottia ovata*, Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and a single Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*.

We looked fruitlessly for Downy-fruited Sedge *Carex filiformis* that had been recorded in Ditch Field but instead found Blue Water-speedwell *Veronica anagallis-aquatica* growing in the ditch. On our return we saw Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, Ragged-Robin *Silene flos-cuculi* and an unusual Hedge Woundwort *Stachys sylvatica* with pale-pink lower lips.

After lunch we went to Barnsley Warren, an oolitic limestone site

grazed by sheep, noted for its population of Pasque Flowers *Pulsatilla vulgaris*. We soon found our target plant, Bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum*. Bastard-toadflax is not a Toadflax but a member of the Sandalwood family Santalaceae. It is semi-parasitic on Hedge Bedstraw *Galium album* and Lady's Bedstraw *G. verum*, both of which were present, and only grows on chalk or limestone.

After our unsuccessful search that morning we were delighted when Clare and Mark Kitchen showed us Downy-fruited Sedge by the roadside near several Bee Orchids and a large Pyramidal Orchid surrounded by Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre*. It was a very enjoyable two-day meeting, thanks to the leaders Pauline and Richard Wilson, Richard Gosnell and Clare and Mark Kitchen and to all who shared their observations and expertise.

JANE LOWE



## FOLKESTONE AND DUNGENESS 25<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> JUNE

### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June - Folkestone Downs

Spot on! The words in the Year Book were Folkestone Downs is one of the largest areas of unimproved chalk downland in Kent with an extensive flora, evidence of ancient human occupation and fine views. We encountered and enjoyed the extensive flora, spotted ancient earthworks of Caesar's Camp and the more modern earthworks of the entrance to the Channel Tunnel and were stunned by the fantastic views. So now to the extensive flora!

Our own WFS Sue Buckingham and Brad Foster, the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership Ranger, were our guides for the day and both were very familiar with the site. Flowers there were aplenty. Scented flowers, such as Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, that smells of new mown hay, Musk Thistle *Carduus nutans* smelling, as its name suggests, rather musky, Small-flowered Sweet-briar *Rosa micrantha* with a lovely apple scent, Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* with a clove-like smell and Marjoram

Photo: Richard Coomber





Photo: Janet John

*Origanum vulgare* smelling with a 'sweet and spicy aroma with floral notes' or so it was described in a book I read.

We found tiny, get down on your knees, flowers such as Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*, Large Thyme *Thymus pulegioides* and Field Madder *Sherardia arvensis*. Take a special look with your lens at a pink flower of Squinancywort– it has an amazing pattern of pink dots.

Also there were lovely 'nice to see' flowers such as Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Greater Celandine *Chelidonium majus* (few of us had ever seen a double-flowered

## Photographic Competition

1<sup>st</sup> in Class 3 - Close-up  
Late Spider-orchid

plant before) and Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea*, as well as a cornucopia of other chalk flowers.

'Plant of the Day', however, had to be the Late Spider-orchid *Ophrys fuciflora*. This was my first sighting of a Late Spider-orchid and it didn't disappoint. Brad explained to us how the special bee that fertilises the plant had moved away from this area of Kent. He has now taken over the role of the bee and he demonstrated how he goes round to each plant with his tiny paintbrush doing the bee's job. We will have to follow the fortunes of the site to see if his efforts have been successful.

A stunning location, lots of flowers, good company – a great day!  
Thanks Sue and Brad.

JANET JOHN

## Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> June - Dungeness

The beach of the Dungeness peninsula in Kent is one of the largest areas of vegetated shingle in Europe and is a rare habitat with associated scarce plants. It is designated as a National Nature Reserve. Wave action during storms causes longshore drift, the movement of pebbles along the coastline. Over 5,000 years this has resulted in a series of shingle ridges and gullies, known as fulls and lows. An aerial photo shows a rather stripy landscape as there is much more vegetation on the tops of the fulls than in the lows. The fulls have finer pebbles and this allows humus to build up and moisture to be retained so plants can grow. Human

intervention has left a mark on the landscape too. The area was at one time known as Nanny Goat Island and Southern Railways have extracted shingle and left a series of steep sided lakes. Removal of the grazing goats has allowed the low vegetation to develop including some areas of scrub.

Most striking, at first, were the acres of Nottingham Catchfly *Silene nutans* with its distinctive clusters of drooping white flowers and the numerous clumps of the red, thread-like stems and tiny, pale-pink flowers of Dodder *Cuscuta epithymum*. The Nottingham Catchfly is avoided by the rabbits as they don't find it palatable – too sticky! The Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* was in full flower, contrasting in form with Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* which flowers earlier. Interestingly, we had seen a lot of Yellow Oat-grass the day before on

the chalk downs at Folkestone. Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia* was also very abundant but, as with many of the species found in the shingle, including mini Wild Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, the specimens were rather small, reflecting the low nutrient and water conditions. The Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* was spreading but very low and formed little undulations in the vegetation amongst the 'crunchy' carpet of lichens. These clumps of *Prunus* and their associated epiphytic lichens are an important component of the Coastal Shingle Heath habitat and of significance in the European context. The low growing *Prunus* and the Broom *Cytisus scoparius* found at this reserve are just 'forms' of the species and would grow to full size in more nutrient rich habitats. Some of the Blackthorn fruit is collected by the local residents who hold an annual sloe gin competition, judged by a local dignitary!



The group on Dungeness

Photo: Kern Southall

The pools held Greater Spearwort *Ranunculus lingua*, with noticeably large flowers, and Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* in flower. Scattered along the edges of one pool, in the shallow water and exposed mud, was the very local and Near Threatened, Lesser Water-plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*, with its basal rosette of strap-shaped leaves, flowers in star-shaped whorls and tight clusters of seeds. The pools had little marginal wet mud habitat but in one damp hollow in the shingle we found Marsh Cinquefoil *Comarum palustre*, a local plant in the south-east, and Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata*.

Looking in Derek Jarman's garden (famous for its cultivation of the native beach flora) we found Cotton Thistle *Onopordum acanthium*, its silvery-grey stem with continuous broad spiny wings, growing in a raised bed. Apparently, *Onopordum* literally means 'donkey fa\*t' reflecting

the physiological effect of inulin consumption on livestock! Walking towards the sea we saw some of the deep-rooted species of vegetated shingle - Yellow Horned-poppay *Glaucium flavum* and Sea Kale *Crambe maritima*. Here we were also treated to Red Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia* and Sea Pea *Lathyrus japonicus*.

We had a super day and were able to see a number of rare plants. The diversity of species makes the Dungeness beach very special and an excellent habitat for a range of biodiversity. Thanks to Owen Leyshon for guiding us round and telling us much about the history of the site. Thank you too to Jacques and Martha, also in the Romney Marsh team, for helping to make it a memorable day.

LYS MUIRHEAD

## EAST ANGLIA 30<sup>th</sup> JUNE - 2<sup>nd</sup> JULY

### Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> June - Beccles Marshes

Twelve members assembled in Fen Quay car park at Beccles. Our route was to lead us along part of the Beccles Marsh Trail, a footpath by the River Waveney, the border between Suffolk and Norfolk at Beccles. Several members had brought their newly delivered 'baby' Stace.

Notable finds in the first one hundred metres included a large Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, Horse-radish

*Armoracia rusticana* and Common Meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*, which had a remarkable superficial similarity to the Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* growing alongside. We spent a little time examining a radish plant, eventually deciding it was Sea Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus*, due to the very beaded seed pods, and keyed out a Forget-me-not as Creeping Forget-me-not *Myosotis secunda*. Unexpected finds were White Stonecrop *Sedum album*, on an old timber beam by the river,



and Pellitory-of-the-wall *Parietaria judaica* on the river bank itself.

New member Gary Hillier pointed out a water vole food stash of a pile of reeds cut at 45° angle amongst the bankside undergrowth. We saw several field or bank voles run across the path and identified a Black-tailed Skimmer (dragonfly) which perched obligingly on a post.

The light, sandy soil encouraged a few arable weeds such as Common Fiddleneck *Amsinckia micrantha* and Scarlet Pimpernel *Lysimachia arvensis*. We identified a Winter-cress as Small-flowered Winter-cress *Barbarea stricta*.

Priscilla Nobbs shepherded us along the river bank footpath to reach our target destination for a late lunch and the reward of both Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* in flower and Water-soldier *Stratiotes aloides* growing plentifully in a ditch close to the river. We returned along a footpath through the Beccles marshes and noticed a Bladderwort flowering in the ditch. Unable to reach a specimen to examine, we resorted to a zoomed photograph to confirm it as Greater Bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris*. The clouds opened with torrential rain on the return to the car park, though some of us still found our way to a café to finish the day.

HELEN DIGNUM

### Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July - Wheatfen

Having dried out after the unexpectedly torrential rain-storm of the previous afternoon, we spent our second day at the idyllic Wheatfen Broad, Surlingham, former home of



Ted Ellis (1909-1986), well-known naturalist, writer, broadcaster and Curator of Natural History at the Castle Museum, Norwich. We kicked off with a very informative and entertaining presentation by reserve warden, Will Fitch, who gave us a flavour of the history of the place and the challenges it currently faces.

Ted Ellis became acquainted with Wheatfen before the second world war when he was asked to identify species of mollusc found on the reserve by then owner, Captain Maurice Cockle. When Captain Cockle died in 1946, Ted first rented, then bought, the land and its cottages, remaining there for the rest of his life. The Ted Ellis Trust was set up in 1987 to manage and protect the reserve.

Photo: Helen Dignum

Ted was an avid observer of the natural world and his, and subsequent study, has racked up an inventory of close to 10,000 species at Wheatfen, possibly the most of any British nature-reserve. He had a particular interest in rust fungi and introduced Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, otherwise uncommon in Norfolk, onto the reserve as a means of studying them. He also planted Broad-leaved Ragwort *Senecio sarracenicus* as a late nectar source for the Large Copper butterflies that he hoped to reintroduce to Britain. The plant survives and thrives; the butterflies sadly did not.

Another well-known denizen of Wheatfen is the Swallowtail butterfly, whose sole food-plant is Milk-parsley *Thysselinum palustre* (it is less fussy and hence less rare on the Continent, where it feeds on a range of Apiaceae species). Will informed us that the Milk-parsley at Wheatfen is being attacked by fungal pathogens, weakening it and causing it to wilt; bad news for the Swallowtails and potentially disastrous for both plant and butterfly if it spreads to other sites.

Other than the species mentioned above, what did we see? We started off with a few Small Teasel *Dipsacus pilosus*, then Cowbane *Cicuta virosa*, once threatened by predation by coypu, one of the few animals able to digest it. Coypu were introduced into Norfolk in the late 1920s for their fur and then escaped but were subsequently eliminated. Incidentally, the coypu were themselves preyed on by Ted's wife Phyllis, who sometimes served them up for dinner, passing

them off as rabbit. Imposing Marsh Sow-thistle *Sonchus palustris* was everywhere along the dykes, though not yet in flower. Also common were Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* and the rarer, pink-tinted subspecies of Hedge Bindweed *Calystegia sepium* ssp. *roseata*, not to mention Stingless Nettle *Urtica dioica* ssp. *galeopsifolia*. We found a single, dark-red-flowered Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, corresponding to Sell and Murrell's rare forma *rubriflorum*. Will pointed out a small stand of Marsh Pea *Lathyrus palustris*, while nearby, we found a couple of plants of Narrow-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza traunsteinerioides*. A highlight for many was a stand of Green Figwort *Scrophularia umbrosa*, with its strongly winged stems and divided staminode.

All well at Wheatfen, then? Well, actually, no. The reserve is acutely threatened by rising sea-levels and increased salinity. The place could be inundated within a few decades. The only silver lining to this habitual cloud is the fact that, with the reserve having been so well studied, the rarer species could be translocated to better-protected sites elsewhere. In the meantime, Wheatfen remains a tranquil haven where it's easy to forget about the mad world beyond. Thanks to Will and his deputy Jordan for hosting us. A great day had by all.

STEVE LITTLE

### **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July - North Denes, Great Yarmouth**

Day three of our East Anglia experience and 15 of us met up on the vast fixed dune system to the north side of Great Yarmouth. No

tourists or sunbathers here as it's a long way out to the sea. The dunes are covered with Marram *Ammophila arenaria* which stabilise the dunes but, dotted around, you can find masses of the very rare Grey Hair-grass *Corynephorus canescens*. This is identified by looking at a spikelet to see the butterfly-shaped club end to the lemma awn and the hairs at the base of the lemma.

There was plenty of sunshine today with a gentle breeze and a few white cumulus clouds in the clear blue sky. Within minutes we had seen Sheep's-bit *Jasione montana*, Japanese Rose *Rosa rugosa* and Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum*. In sandy soils you can find a fine-leaved form of Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* spp. *acetosella* var. *tenuifolius*. The common or garden Cat's-ear has a coastal form too, which can be more prostrate in form and smaller in all its parts, *Hypochaeris radicata* ssp. *ericetorum*. The more orange-coloured flowers of Fragrant Evening-primrose *Oenothera stricta* added more colour to the scenery. We gradually made our way southwards heading towards a seaside cafe when our eyes were assailed by a swarm of Woolly Hawkweed *Hieracium lanatum*. I had seen it here before many years ago but now there are hundreds of these bright yellow flowers which have very woolly-hairy phyllaries. We had our lunch sitting in the sunshine on the warm sand which is when the Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls arrived to see what they could scavenge.

Close by and bordered by a boardwalk we could find many specimens of an unusual hybrid

grass, a cross between Wood Small-reed and Marram called Purple Marram X *Calammophila baltica* var. *baltica* and its spikelets were suffused with purple but it's also the length of the basal hairs of the lemmas that need to be taken into consideration. Nearby is a small boating lake surrounded by some raised beds where some plants had spread and become naturalised. Out of some of the cracks in the stones was the occasional pink flower of Cretan Rock-rose *Cistus creticus* along with the strong blue flowers of Macedonian Scabious *Knautia macedonica*. Our *piece de resistance* was found amongst the large plants of Shrubby Ragwort *Brachyglottis x jubar* 'Sunshine'. The plant that we discovered growing here had been mentioned in a few articles earlier this year and I had been looking for it all over the place. It's a Broomrape that grows on this particular plant and its stems are coloured purple and goes by the name of *Orobanche minor* var. *heliophila*. Another surprise here was to find an orange coloured Yarrow spreading in nooks and crannies called *Alchemilla millefolium* 'Fanal'.

Technically, this was the end to a particularly splendid day but there was one other plant to present a particular challenge as it was quite a hike away further to the north but an intrepid few made the jaunt there and back to finally add the coastal form of Lesser Meadow-rue *Thalictrum minor* ssp. *arenaria*.

Especial thanks to Priscilla Nobbs for organising and leading these wonderful few days.

STEPHEN CLARKSON

## ONE DAY MEETINGS 2022

### SELSDON WOOD AND HUTCHINSON'S BANK 8<sup>th</sup> MAY

I was delighted to co-lead this WFS walk with Jane Lowe and Linda Pitkin, as I live in Croydon and am a big fan of both Hutchinson's Bank and Selsdon Wood, which are two of the botanical gems in Croydon's crown. Hutchinson's Bank, at 14 hectares, is one of the larger areas of chalk grassland remaining in Greater London and has been managed as a nature reserve by the London Wildlife Trust on behalf of Croydon Council for over 35 years. Selsdon Wood is 200 hectares of ancient woodland which is owned by the National Trust, but managed by the London Borough of Croydon with the assistance of a voluntary group, the Friends of Selsdon Wood (FSW).

We met on a sunny morning at the tram stop in New Addington and after Jane had done the introductions, we made our way to the entrance at the top of Hutchinson's bank which is situated beside the less-than-glamorous "Fisher's Farm Household Reuse and Recycling centre". But of course, things like that don't bother botanists. As we progressed down the path alongside the recycling centre towards the woodland at the top of the site, we started spotting some of the usual suspects typical of path edges and disturbed ground. Some Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* was growing helpfully beside some Hemlock *Conium maculatum* so we were able to compare some of the differences

Photo: Moira O'Donnell

Common Gromwell





between them, for example the purple-blotched stems of the Hemlock. As the path dropped into the trees, we started to see typical woodland species such as Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana* and Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*.

Emerging out of the trees into the grassland we soon saw one of the first stars of the day, Common Gromwell *Lithospermum officinale*, which is not nearly as common as its name suggests. This member of the Boraginaceae has rather inconspicuous small cream-coloured flowers and after flowering produces attractive shiny, grey nutlets. Other chalk-loving species were Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Wild Mignonette *Reseda lutea* and Hairy Violet *Viola hirta*, which gave us an opportunity to look at the differences between the sepal appendages of that and Sweet Violet *Viola odorata*.

As this point we exited the site along the track into a residential street and this gave us the chance to look at some of plants growing at the roadside and in the pavement cracks, including some Thyme-leaved Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia*. We then made our way into Frith Wood, another area of ancient woodland, where we were treated to some lovely ancient woodland indicator species like Yellow Archangel *Lamium galeobdolon* ssp. *montanum*, Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and, of course, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*.

Leaving Frith Wood, it was a short walk to the Court Wood Lane

entrance into Selsdon Wood, and we made our way straight to the next star of our walk, Herb-Paris *Paris quadrifolia*. Herb-Paris is another ancient woodland indicator, and is a stunning plant which has a whorl of four leaves (although there can be three to eight) beneath a terminal flower. The fruit is a black, berry-like capsule. It is found in two locations in the wood and the FSW use its image as their logo.

By this time, we had most definitely earned our lunch so found some tree trunks to sit on to eat, before heading back towards Hutchinson's Bank. On the way we took the opportunity to check out one of the four groups of Early-purple Orchid *Orchis mascula* that are found in the wood. Making our way back through Frith Wood on a different path we spotted an unusual Bluebell mutation with extra-long bracts and a Common Twayblade *Neottia ovata*.

Once back at Hutchinson's Bank we paid a visit to the area of ancient woodland known as Threecorner Grove, for some more woodland plants including Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* and Woodruff *Galium odoratum*.

At this point Linda and I left the group and Jane led the rest of them up through Slimmings Down on the way back up to the tram stop in New Addington. No doubt they encountered some more lovely calcicoles on the way, to round off a most enjoyable day!

MOIRA O'DONNELL

# OLDBURY NUCLEAR POWER STATION RESERVE

## 22<sup>nd</sup> JUNE

2022 seems to be the Year of Industrial Heritage WFS Field Meetings! Dungeness, the site of an advanced gas-cooled reactor which has been non-operational since 2018; South Gare next to the Redcar steelworks near the mouth of the River Tees which closed in 2015; Oldbury Nuclear Power Station whose two Magnox nuclear reactors were finally closed down in 2012.

Sites like these give rise to interesting and surprising flora. Building materials were brought in from all over the country, bringing seeds and plants with them; traces of metals and chemicals are found over the site; people may have been excluded from the sites for long periods of time; no fertilisers ever used and little or no management of the flora. Hence the sites are left very much to nature to sort them out. This makes for interesting botanical forays.

Oldbury Power Station is on the banks of the River Severn within sight of the Severn Bridges. You may, like me, have driven across these bridges countless times without ever having stopped to investigate the flora of the area. You have missed a treat.

Clare and Mark Kitchen guided us expertly through the flora of rough grassland, sparse woodland, industrial waste and estuary habitats.

As well as going to interesting locations with like-minded individuals, one of the best features of a WFS Field Meeting is getting good hints for identifying plants which are not always obvious from reading a book.

This meeting didn't let us down. Rough Hawk's-beard *Crepis biennis* has seeds like cylinders. They don't taper, which is not the case for Beaked Hawk's-beard *C. vesicaria* which flowers earlier and has seeds which narrow at the end. Grasses are a particular focus for me as I want to improve my identification skills. We saw Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*. The Bents have single florets – but lots of them, Creeping Bent as you would guess is stoloniferous and its stem is bent!

We saw some good sedges. Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta* which is hairy all over – stems, leaves and fruit. Spiked Sedge *C. spicata* has a ligule which is longer than wide and False Fox-Sedge *C. otrubae*, which you may not have noticed, has a stem which widens to its base.

Then there are the plants which always give particular pleasure. For me Stone Parsley *Sison amomium* is one. An attractive plant from a distance – don't get too close it has an unpleasant petrol smell; Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* such a wonderful splash of colour when spotted; and the orchids - Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*, Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*.

As we were alongside the shore-line at times we did see Sea Wormwood *Artemisia maritima*, Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima* and Sea Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus*

Plant of the day had to be Yellow-vetch *Vicia lutea*, with its hairy pods, as this was a new one for me.

Varied habitats, lots of plants, a step forward in botanical knowledge .....a good day out. Thanks to Clare and Mark.

JANET JOHN

## SLIMBRIDGE 23<sup>rd</sup> JUNE

Established in 1946 by Sir Peter Scott, the Slimbridge Wetland Centre is famous for its activities that focus on bird conservation. Less well-known perhaps is the flora that has developed within the watery habitats the centre is committed to conserving. Having been granted access to explore parts of the reserve not ordinarily accessible to members of the public, we assembled at the centre where we were greeted by the Reserve Manager, Dave Paynter. Dave gave us a brief history of the centre and the geology of the area, before setting off to examine its diverse plant life. To begin, we didn't have to walk far, as by the entrance was a patch of unimproved grassland that contained Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*, Hop Trefoil *Trifolium campestre*, Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia*, Meadow Crane's-bill *Geranium pratense* and Lady's Bedstraw *Gallium verum*. In one corner a number of Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* were spotted, our first of several encounters with this species of orchid across the reserve. Nearby, weedy ground yielded Annual Beard-grass *Polypogon monspeliensis* looking very beardy,

while an adjacent damper area produced Corky-fruited Water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*.

Moving to another part of the reserve, we were shown an area of damp grassland that was flush with orchids. We noted Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Southern Marsh-orchids *D. praetermissa* and the hybrid between the two *D. x grandis*, exhibiting exceptional hybrid vigour. Common Twayblade *Neottia ovata* and Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis* were also seen in this area, along with the unusual 'Wasp Orchid'. This is not a separate species of orchid but a strangely beautiful variant of a Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* var. *trollii* that has a long tapering lip. After the wasp orchids had been greatly admired, we returned to explore the areas by the centre building.

As a consequence of heavy goose grazing, herb-only habitats have developed on the reserve, which are distinct in the large numbers of flowering plants and very small numbers of grasses. We explored one such herb-rich community that was dominated by colourful swathes

Photo: Charles Whitworth



of, amongst others, Oxeye Daisies *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, Silverweed *Potentilla anserina* and punctuated by the odd Bee Orchid. In one hedgerow, we were shown a Willow hybrid *Salix x rubra*, a cross between Purple Willow *S. purpurea* and Osier *S. viminalis*. After this, we headed toward the Centre building where birds and visitors intermingle closely. Around the edges of the ponds we saw juvenile non-flowering plants of Golden Dock *Rumex maritimus* and, arguably, the star of the show Grass-poly *Lythrum hyssopifolia*. This extremely rare, native plant, confined to a small handful of locations in the UK, was thriving at Slimbridge on the margins of the ponds trampled by birds and people. With flowers fully open, the Grass-poly plants were greatly appreciated and photographed. A detour before lunch involved venturing into another area of damp grassland and marsh. Here, more Bee Orchids were seen and, after some searching, Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum* was found but without their adder's-tongue-like fruiting spikes. Almond Willow *Salix triandra* was noted nearby.

By this time, many of us were wilting in the heat of the midday sun, so we retreated into the centre for lunch. Dave left us at this point, but provided us with instructions for the afternoon. Refreshed after lunch, we walked to the edge of the wetlands by the river Severn. We were rewarded by a panoramic view across the river toward Chepstow as well as some common plants typical of an estuarine habitat. The hoped for promise of Stiff Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia rupestris* did not appear to materialise. Some emerging plants sparked mixed debate about whether they could be this species, or, whether they were Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua*. More conclusive identification was reached about Greater Burdock *Arctium lappa* growing in a hedgerow on the way back to the centre.

Many thanks to Dave Paynter for guiding us around parts of the reserve not open to the public, enabling us to learn a great deal about the reserve's wetland plants species and the distinct habitats in which they grow.

NICK ASTON



Grass-poly



## CRESSING TEMPLE BARNs, ESSEX 29<sup>th</sup> JUNE

About 20 of us met up at Cressing Temple Barns in Essex. It was a slightly showery day but not enough to dampen our spirits. We walked across a large area of grassland where, to our delight, we found many self-sown plants of the Field Eryngo *Eryngium campestre*, possibly escaped from the walled gardens about a quarter of a mile away. We had fun studying different forms of Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis* so well described in Sell and Murrell. We found Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, with its distinctive forked hairs.

We eventually reached the big mound of waste ground where we found many treasures including Pumpkin *Cucurbita maxima*, which looked suspiciously planted, and Fuller's Teasel *Dipsacus sativus*, with the stiff, rigid recurved spines, conveniently growing next to Common Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum* so we could compare the two. Nearby was a magnificent Cotton Thistle *Onopordum acanthium* with the distinctive cottony hairs. It was like Aladdin's cave with all the amazing plants we were seeing. The next excitement was seeing the dark purple-brown seed pods of Woad *Isatis tinctoria*.

Our leader, Stephen Clarkson, drew our attention to three mulleins growing next to each other. The first one was Dark Mullein *Verbascum nigrum*, followed by Hungarian Mullein *V. speciosum* and the final one was the hybrid *Verbascum x angulosum*, a brilliant find. After a

refreshing lunch we walked to the Cressing Barns, a wonderful example of a 13<sup>th</sup> century timber framed building used by the Knights Templar. They were originally Barley Barn and Wheat Barn adjacent to a beautiful Tudor walled garden. We walked round it, smelling the various herbs and enjoying the calm. In a shady area we keyed out an unusual campanula with pale-blue, funnel-shaped flowers. It turned out to be Spreading Bellflower *Campanula patula*, a new one for many of us.



Photo: Kern Southall

At the end some of us drove on to Tiptree where Stephen hoped to show us the Tongue-orchid *Serapias lingua*. We searched everywhere in the area walking through rough heathland. After 20 minutes or so Stephen drew us all together and said, "It really should be here." He looked down at his feet and, lo and behold, there were approximately 60 Tongue-orchids *Serapias lingua*, somewhat over, but a couple still in flower. What a great end to a fabulous day. Many thanks to Stephen for all his knowledge which he clearly shared with us.

JAN ARMISHAW

## OBITUARY

### DAVID ALBON 1942 - 2022

Photo: Steve Little



David  
communing  
with Bog Fern  
*Blechnum  
palmiforme*, an  
endemic of  
Tristan da  
Cunha

David Albon was born in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, in July 1942. The family lived on the edge of the town surrounded by fields, trees and wildlife and this nurtured in David an interest in, and love for, the natural world from an early age. The family grew much of its own produce and David would often work with his father in the garden, picking up gardening expertise and other practical skills along the way. His horticultural knowledge was extensive and came in extremely useful in identifying garden-escapes when we were out botanising.

David's own garden is testament to his passion for plants, an intriguing mixture of the cultivated and the wild, with numerous examples of plants 'repatriated' from his travels and others that simply drifted in; his collection of bird-sown cotoneasters rivals that of Cherry Hinton chalk-pits !

Having studied geography at Cambridge and town-planning at Nottingham, David embarked on a career with West Suffolk County Council. He swiftly rose to become Head of Planning and was instrumental in ensuring that the centre of Bury St. Edmunds was developed in such a way as to preserve the historic integrity of the town. All the while, David was living the 'Good Life' with wife Betty in Thurston, a rural village close to Bury. They kept chickens and grew many of their own fruit and vegetables.

When I met David in 2012, I'd only taken up botany the previous year. By his own admission, David's knowledge of wild plants was not as comprehensive as his knowledge of garden ones so we embarked on a wide-ranging programme of on-the-job training. Initially we did this by

ourselves, mainly in Suffolk and Gloucestershire, but in 2014 we discovered the Wild Flower Society and the rest is history, as they say. WFS meetings became the mainstay of our spring and summer travels. We covered the length and breadth of the British Isles and virtually every habitat going, from Dwarf Eel-grass *Zostera noltii* below sea-level in Moray to the heights of Bens Lawers, Macdhuil and Nevis in search of alpine plants. We also loved botanising on our own, choosing a place to go and seeing what was there, chance discoveries always providing the most satisfaction.

David had a huge zest for life and loved to travel. We started off with Saint Helena in 2014, where we saw how the introduction of alien species, particularly New Zealand Flax, had virtually wiped out native and endemic species. We fared somewhat better on Tristan da Cunha four years later, where much of the native vegetation survives intact. Interspersed with those trips, David also enjoyed botanical adventures in Majorca and Greece.

David died on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2022 of mesothelioma. Even as his health began to give way, he was determined not to let it interfere with our botanical activities. We had our last outing 10 days before he died; an interesting-looking field about to become a housing-estate in Thetford, where with customary serendipity we found a substantial quantity of Forked Catchfly *Silene dichotoma*.

I think it's fair to say that David became something of a stalwart of

the Wild Flower Society. People always took to him and enjoyed engaging with him not only for his botanical knowledge but for his gentle nature and quiet good humour. The large attendance at his funeral is testament to the respect and affection in which he was held and he will be much missed by all who knew him.

STEVE LITTLE

I am greatly saddened to read of the death of David Albon. At the onset of the 1970's, I was appointed to the post of Warden at Clare Castle Country Park, Suffolk. David was my superior, a planner and Countryside Officer. He was a delight to work with, ever full of enthusiasm, ever ready to try new methods and new projects, keen and easy-going. His knowledge of things rural, his concern for all wildlife and being alert to new ideas and information, all contributed to the park's progress and to the pleasures of my life as the new park warden. Quite unconventional in many ways, especially in the amount of hours he worked, the park quickly gained a good reputation.

We came from quite different backgrounds and in the years I worked with him, I do not recall ever having a cross word; he was always polite, fair and generous.

Ambition keeps no-one static and in later years we both went our different ways, both to work on new projects, in Suffolk. But we often met, at meetings, outings and lectures and such, all environmentally linked.

I was a visitor to Clare Castle Country



Park last week – a nostalgic walk, remembering the early days when we were transforming the old railway station and derelict castle, into the park gem it has become.

I shall miss him, his great love of the countryside and his contributions to the well-being of the environment.

MICHAEL STAGG



Photo: Janet John