

HARROW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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PRESIDENT'S PIECE

SOCIETY FIELD TRIP

Our field trip this year was to the Isle of Thanet in Kent, an area I was unfamiliar with until I did the trip with John and Margaret to set up the itinerary. The land was flatter than I expected but with lots of wildlife and not too overcrowded with people and cars.

The Pegwell Bay Hotel had wonderful views across the bay to Deal Pier in the distance. The food was excellent and plenty of it, the accommodation was comfortable and the staff helpful. I would recommend it if you are ever in the Ramsgate area as they also have a pub opposite the hotel and will serve food to none residents there. Parking is easy in the hotel car park.

Our first stop on the journey was Shore Woods Country Park just off the A2, where we met to have lunch and went for a walk spotting our first orchid. Well in fact it was already spotted when we saw it – it was a common spotted – just by the entrance. We moved on to Oare Marshes for our first bird watching experience of ducks and waders.

The next day we parked in Pegwell Bay Nature Reserve and had a lovely walk among wild fennel which smelt very appetising, and listened to the constant call of the cuckoo, ending up admiring some southern marsh orchids. We had lunch by the Viking ship down the road and went to Blean Woods that afternoon to be greeted by a Heath Fritillary butterfly which was very cooperative and loved being photographed.

On Thursday we started out for Stodmarsh bird reserve but only half the cars made it to the car park because the only road into from our direction it was closed. The rest ended up at the other end of the marsh but somehow we all managed to meet up at the same pub for lunch at exactly the same time. I don't know what the others saw, but we had a good view of a Marsh Harrier and a very charming group of 2 swans with 9 cygnets on a "swim about".

At the pub we paid through the nose for inedible food with pepper water soup which Celia and I complained about and were eventually offered free coffee, which was at least drinkable. We joined the party later at a disused quarry which, apart from the usual chalk-loving flora, also had a good showing of man orchids, a lizard orchid not yet in full flower and adder's tongue ferns. The weather had taken a turn for the worse, so, by the time we had heard an interesting talk from the warden in the centre and seen the exhibits, we set off for the hotel in the rain.

On Friday morning we took a packed breakfast from the hotel to Sandwich Bird Observatory where we had arranged to see bird ringing but the weather was determined to give us a soaking, so we sat and listened to a talk by the warden while we had our sandwich and hot drink - the bird ringing had not been possible. Very soon the rain stopped and we went with the warden to see more marsh orchids and a lizard orchid (this one in flower) which was growing in someone's lawn by a nearby road.

We went back to the observatory building to see some moths which had been trapped the previous night and to see many of the other exhibits on show and drink more hot drinks of course. After lunch was free time, some staying on in this area, others going to Sandwich town and some exploring nearby nature reserves.

On Saturday, before returning home, we stopped off to explore woods at Rough Pasture north of Canterbury because we had heard a nightingale on our previous visit in May and Heath Fritillaries were to be found there, but we were unlucky this time. We then headed for a wildlife centre where we had some lunch in a cafe before making our way home.

For next year, I have been asked to arrange a field trip in the Dorchester area of Dorset. I am having difficulty finding a suitable hotel at present, so any suggestions would be very welcome.

Evelyn Crispe

BUTTERFLIES IN STANMORE COUNTRY PARK - JUNE 26th 2010

About 14 people gathered for our summer walk and, for a change, the sun was shining. What we were hoping to see were Ringlets and Marbled Whites. Alas we didn't spot either.

A few Meadow Browns had emerged and the ever present Speckled Woods were encountered throughout the reserve. One Large Skipper was found in a small clearing and several Common Blues were seen in the larger meadows. A couple of Whites flew past us without settling. The last butterfly encountered was a freshly emerged Comma. We scanned some Elm for White-letter Hairstreaks but didn't spot any.

The only moth species seen were several Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnets

However the postscript to this was, on the next Wednesday as I was doing a spot of sapling birch removal, I spotted a Ringlet in an area of the Park that I hadn't seen them in before. They were also flying in the meadow I expected to find them in the previous Saturday. It looks like this walk will be a week later next year.

John Hollingdale

SOME REPORTS OF BIRDS IN SPRING AND SUMMER 2010

Due to the prolonged cold winter, many of our winter visitors were late leaving. Redwings and fieldfares could be seen in gardens into March. Goosanders were present on Summerhouse Lake until the last week of March, the maximum number reported was 7.

The pair of swans were seen on Summerhouse Lake at the beginning of March but they did not stay to breed, possibly because there were not enough young weeds for them to feed on. A pair of gadwalls was present from the beginning of March until the first week of May but they did not breed as far as we can tell.

The summer visitors were late arriving, the first reported chiffchaffs were on 1st April. A few are now over-wintering in the South of England but the majority still migrates to the Mediterranean area. There are a good number of swallows at Lower Priory Farm again. There were 4 well-grown young mandarins on Brewery Pond in the middle of June. Ring-necked parakeets are still increasing in the area as they are breeding wherever the habitat is suitable. They will come into gardens and flocks of up to 40 or 50 birds have been seen over Pinner in the evening.

Two pairs of house martins nested in the eaves of a house on Little Common and bred successfully.

Elizabeth Stainthorpe