



President: Geoff Corney Editor: Joanne Colthup Newsletter No 74 Autumn 2015

Chairman's Report

The 17 Natural History members who came to the field trip at St Leonards on Sea this year enjoyed our break although the weather was anything but perfect and we had a very wet trip down to the coast, meeting up at Marle Place Gardens where some of us braved the weather and explored the grounds while the others had a drink in the cafe.

Thankfully the next day was dry, and in the morning we explored Filsham Reed bed in Filsham where the birds were in full song and included Blackbird, Song thrush, Blackcap, Sedge Warbler and Cetti Warbler. On the return journey to the cars we heard a Cuckoo and a Green Woodpecker. Swallow, Swifts and a Hobby were also seen.

On Friday afternoon we visited the Visitor Centre where they had an exhibition including Dinosaur parts and fossils. We finished the day with various walks with fine sea views and my companions and I found a disused quarry with many ferns which we could not identify with certainty.

Saturday morning we went to Dungeness RSPB reserve and took a walk to the nearest hide where we saw Sea Kale, Thrift and Houndstongue growing and both heard and saw Marsh Frogs. Some took the longer walk and saw some Marsh Harriers, Hobbies, Buzzard, and Great White Egret and Little Grebe. Blackcap, Cetti and Sedge Warblers were heard. In the afternoon most members took a ride on the Hythe and Dungeness Railway but I preferred to explore the area and saw Brown Argus, Common Blue and Small White butterflies. A Red Admiral was also seen earlier.

Sunday morning we set off for Rye Harbour RSPB reserve in gorgeous sunshine but with a strong and bitter wind blowing, which I found very unpleasant. I joined the short walk and saw Redshank, Greenshank and a Spoonbill. I left the group at this point and went back to the harbour to get some shelter and warm up while the others took a longer walk to see some nesting birds: Shelduck, Avocets, Lapwings, Black headed Gulls, and Common and Sandwich Terns.

On Sunday afternoon we walked along the Royal Military Canal and saw White Water Lilies in flower while some of the others explored the shore line.

On the way home on Monday we stopped off at Bodiam Castle where we got another rain soaked experience, but some joined a talk on medieval warfare and were shown weapons and armour which would have been used at that time which I found very interesting.

Evelyn Crispe

Old Park Wood, Ruislip. Thursday 9th April 2015. Leaders: Charles & Pam Davies.

On a fine spring morning seven of us met in King's College Rd for a walk in Old Park Wood, mainly to see Wood Anemones in flower. Before we started however Joanne spotted some Early Dog Violets in the road side verge, probably survivors before development of the area took place, and also of the Three Cornered Leek.

The ground was very muddy around the entrance and we had to skirt around what appeared to be a small stream before we managed to get on to the main path leading up-wards. The recent fine weather had brought the trees, chiefly Hornbeam into leaf, but apart from some Lesser Celandines near the start most of the plants noted were along the top ride. These included Wood Anemone, Ivy-leaved Speedwell, Wavy Bittercress, Barren Strawberry and Hairy Woodrush.

On the way up a Buzzard was seen overhead, and other birds noted, but not necessarily seen. They were Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Great and Blue Tits, Wren, Nuthatch, Jay, Chaffinch and Green Finch. Several Brimstone and Peacock butterflies were seen fluttering around at various times.

Turning left along the main bridleway were several patches of Wood Anemone but the main show was

down a footpath about 200 yards on the left hand side. They flowered like a river either side of the path almost to the bottom where there was an exit out onto Broadwood Ave.

Unfortunately, in places they are beginning to be obscured by brambles. Let's hope they don't take over completely as the anemones are a lovely sight in the spring. Half of us returned along the path behind the houses and Charles led the others back along the River Pinn where we met up for a bite to eat sitting in the sun.

Stanmore Country Park Moth Evening – Friday 18th April Leader John Hollingdale

Eight of us gathered on an inauspicious evening weather wise. The sky was clear and a fresh breeze from the East was blowing. However, much to my surprise moths came regularly until the audience started to complain about the temperature and we packed up after an hour and three quarters. My outdoor thermometer at home was reading 2.3 degrees C by the morning. The last moth to arrive was a Grey Shoulder-knot which pleased Robert Payne and this was the first one he had seen. Robert did most of the identification and we must thank him for that. My thanks also go to Colin Plant for identifying the two Acleris.

Here is the full list of species:

Frosted Green	Brindled Pug	Early Thorn	Engrailed
Lunar Marbled Brown	Small Quaker	Common Quaker	Clouded Drab
Twin Spotted Quaker	Grey Shoulder-knot	Satelite	Nut-tree Tussock
Eriocrania subpurpurella	Acleris notana		

John Hollingdale

Bluebells and Butterflies - April 25th Stanmore Country Park. Leader John Hollingdale.

Apart from the usual suspects of the Harrow Natural History Society, we were joined by Malcolm Hull; the Herts and Middx Butterfly Conservation Branch's new chairman.

After a cloudy morning the sun emerged and so did the butterflies. We did a circuit covering most of the country park's nature trail, however we deviated across the corner of the Wood Farm extension which makes up part of Greater Stanmore Country Park.

Butterflies seen: Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Speckled Wood.

Oh, and the Bluebells seem to be spreading across the site in recent years.

At the top of 40 Acre Field the tall buildings of the city was clearly seen.

John Hollingdale

Bird Song at Bentley Priory led by Brian Hunter Friday May 1st.

A pleasant day, the meeting was well attended for this early walk, we met at 9.30am.

The birds are listed in order either seen or heard. After a number of years I am still bad at recognizing bird song so have to rely on group members to identify them.

Starling, Ring necked Parakeet, Crow, Blackcap, Song Thrush, Robin, Wood Pigeon, Blackbird, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Swallow, Great tit, Wren, Chiff chaff, Chaffinch, Blue tit, Nuthatch, Heron, Grey Wagtail, Long-tailed tit, Coot, Moorhen, Tufted Duck, and Canada Geese.

Joanne Colthup

Walk for flowers at Bentley Priory. Friday June 19th Leader: Joanne Colthup

This walk is the annual event for the Friends of Bentley Priory, but usually only members of our society attend. However this year we did have two Friends of Bentley Priory who found the variety of flowers a revelation to them.

We decided not to follow the nature trail but to make our way to the Master Oak, and then up through Spring Meadow which is good botanically. There are damp areas which yielded Greater Bird's Foot Trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, Brook Lime *Veronica beccabunga*, and Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*. On drier ground there were large patches of the smaller common Bird's Foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* which is the food plant of the Common Blue Butterfly and Devil's Bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*.

At the top of the reserve near to the fence dividing Bentley Priory from the reserve there was a clump of Musk Mallow *Malva moschata*, and Russian Comfrey *Symphytum x uplandicum*.

Then at Bevin's Marsh there was plentiful Celery-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus* and more Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*. John noted several Dragon flies Broad-bodied Chasers and Margaret and John saw a female Emperor Dragon fly in grassland just before Summerhouse lake. At several spots especially looking into the deer park we saw remains of what would have been beautiful displays of Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea* just going over.

Brian has kindly added the following bird report.

We heard blackbirds frequently, Blackcaps several times and Song Thrushes a few times. We also heard Chaffinch, Wren, Greenfinch, Green Woodpecker, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff. We saw about 100 Jackdaws in the deer park, a Buzzard soaring at the top of the park and also saw Robin, Crow and Woodpigeon.

On Summerhouse Lake there was a family of Canada Geese with two nearly fully grown young as well as a female Mandarin duck with three well grown young.

We also saw on the lake Heron, Coot, Moorhen and Mallard but were disappointed not to see any Swallows or Grey Wagtails there.

Prestwick Road Meadows South Oxhey Thursday 25th June. Leader: Joanne Colthup

I discovered the small reserve belonging to Three Rivers DC through a leaflet found in Rickmansworth (my old home). As it is good to support local reserves I drove to look at it and found it hidden away in South Oxhey. It consisted of several wild flower meadows which according to the leaflet were very rich botanically and cut only once a year.

The meadows were not particularly rich botanically but held a variety of grasses, scatterings of several vetches, Red Champion, Bird's Foot Trefoil and a lot of Common Knapweed still in bud.

A pond was noted on the leaflet but we were not able to locate it even by detecting vegetation growing in damp areas. Local dog walkers did not seem to know of its existence.

There were just four of us on the walk and it was pleasant to walk through obviously old meadows, and we did note the following butterflies Speckled Wood, Small Tortoiseshell, and Meadow Brown.

Stanmore Country Park for Summer Butterflies and Flowers. Sat. 27th June. Leader John Hollingdale.

A good crowd including a member of the Herts and Middx Butterfly Group met in the Dennis Lane car park to start at 11.00. I concentrated on recording the plants and John the butterflies.

In the open grassland at the start of the walk was a long established clump of Yellow Loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, probably originally a garden escape. Then the long heads of Timothy Grass *Phleum pratense*. Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus* was in bloom by the ponds, and as we entered the wood Enchanter's Nightshade *Circea lutetiana* was in flower at the edge of paths. In the cleared areas we found Lesser Stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* in quantity and Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*.

The butterflies seen were Speckled Wood, Ringlet, Large Skipper, Small White, Meadow Brown Red Admiral, Large White, Marbled White, and Common Blue. Several moths were noted a Silver Y and a Burnet Companion, also a Hawker Dragonfly.

Joanne Colthup

Wood Farm for wildlife and views Thursday 9th July Leader: Joanne Colthup

The nature reserve has still not been opened officially so the car park was locked. We were given access by Rosie who led us through Pear Wood on a path recently made by Peter Elton.

The reserve, an extension of Stanmore Country Park has good paths encircling the view point which is the highest point, from which can be seen prominent land marks in central London and beyond. Brian brought his 'scope' which was helpful though we were looking through a heat haze.

The reserve was a landfill site which has been naturalized so all sorts of plants have come up, many not native to the area as the origin of the soil is unknown.

The dominant plants are Goat's Rue *Galegia officinalis* and Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvensis*.

We found a number of plants in the Pea family as Goat's Rue, Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Yellow Vetchling *Lathyrus aphaca*, and Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*. Even others in the same family were discovered near to the end of the walk Golden Melilot *Melilotus altissima* and White Melilot *Melilotus alba*. The scrape area which contains a pond was covered in a blanket of white, which on close

inspection was Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre*.

Near to the view point were two clumps of beautiful blue Chicory *Cichorium intybus* and a great deal of Wild Carrot *Daucus carota* both plants more accustomed to a lime soil so not native to the area. I will not list other flowering plants, but there were a great variety.

Few birds were heard due to the lack of trees on the site but a Whitethroat and a Song Thrush were heard in surrounding woodland.

John listed the butterflies which were Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Large and Small Skippers, Comma, Holly Blue and Large and Green-veined Whites.

Saturday 11th July 2015: Grasses, Sedges and Rushes in Pear Wood Leader: Rosie Etheridge

This year we had a hot fine day for our annual grass walk. Unfortunately the recent very hot weather had dried up most of the grasses. Nonetheless we had a pleasant walk, which was attended by Claire, Joanne, Brian, Charles and Pam, John and Margaret, and Elizabeth.

We started with a quick revision of the differences between grass, sedge and rush stems. Grasses are hollow with nodes, sedges have three edges and rushes are round with pith inside. Then we set off down the track.

The most interesting area was the top of the Grim's Dyke. We saw soft and compact rush, hairy woodrush and a sedge that was not in flower. We also admired the expanding patches of heather and bell heather and the wavy hairgrass.

The most conspicuous grasses were common bent and creeping soft-grass. The later is also known as hairy knees because of the hairs on its nodes. Brian was unimpressed and said his own knees were much more hairy, but he wouldn't show them to us.

We visited the Scout and Guide fields and looked for butterflies around the brambles. Then we walked very quietly around Pear Lake so as not to disturb the fishermen, who were holding a fishing competition.

Next year we must hold the walk a few weeks earlier when more grasses are in flower.

Rosie Etheridge

Shenley Park . Friday 7th August. Leader: Joanne Colthup

This was an area unknown to me, and was built on the site of the old psychiatric hospital. On arrival it was very difficult to park as we realized that we had made the mistake of choosing the school holidays but walking round it was quiet enough.

We started in the Walled Garden which is enormous and several hundred years old, it was well cared for and full of cultivated shrubs and flowers and so good for insects especially bees which John especially was able to appreciate and identify.

We moved towards the orchard which would have provided fruit for the patients. It is obviously a good year for fruit as the apple and pear trees were laden. There were notices not to pick, but they were not quite ready.

After the orchard we found a wild flower meadow which seemed to be the obvious way back to the cafe and the car park. It was botanically rich with much Lady's Bedstraw, Heath Bedstraw, Prickly Oxtongue, Field Scabious, and several Willowherbs. John identified several Six Spotted Burnet Moths and a Vapourer.

After lunch at the excellent cafe where we sat outside trying to avoid the many wasps, some members walked to find the view point. Brian pointed out a couple of Red Kites resting in the meadow, Buzzards were also seen and Elizabeth saw Darter (probably Common) dragonflies in a pool on the way to the viewpoint.

During the day we also identified the following butterflies Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Red Admiral, Peacock, Marion saw a Painted Lady, Holly Blue, (many), Large Skipper, and Large White.