

West Oxfordshire Field Club

www.thefieldclub.org.uk



Newsletter No. 100 Autumn 2014

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 100th WOFC Newsletter! As I write, the autumn mists are just curling away in the weak early morning sunlight. It appears to be an early autumn – the spiders are already moving in, and the local swallows and house martins left more than two weeks earlier than usual, but there are still some nests with unfledged young taking advantage of the abundance of insects around just now.

It was reported to be a poor summer for butterflies, but they have been plentiful in my garden. However, I have had no painted ladies or silver Y moths, and scarcely any ladybirds – but then, I have seen very few aphids. On a brilliantly warm, sunny Saturday morning I joined a large group of butterfly enthusiasts at Bernwood Forest. Having visited many times before and never seen a white admiral, they were flying in great numbers near the car park, and the purple emperors were out, too. The whole forest was alive with butterflies. Large silver-washed fritillaries drifted along the rides, and I watched as one was actually driven off a flower by a much smaller skipper.

Seabirds suffered badly in last winter's storms, and the effects of the altered coastlines have had their effect this summer, with birds such as terns being forced to nest in lower sites than usual, and suffering summer flooding. A trip to Juniper Valley gave me a splendid view of red kites courting. Alerted by a 'different' call, I watched them tumble through the sky. It reminded me of a dramatic coupling of a pair of cuckoos on the edge of a cliff in Cornwall against a deep pink sunset witnessed some time ago. For some years, cuckoos have been missing from my garden – they used to mate in the willow tree there. But they are plentiful on Otmoor, where they take advantage of the many reed warbler nests to lay their eggs. I heard them again on the Somerset Levels, eating a picnic lunch to the background sound of cuckoos, bitterns booming, and Cetti's warblers – there are some 60 pairs there.

After a summer of fascinating country walks full of wildflowers, birds and butterflies, the Club is now looking forward to winter birding in Norfolk and fungus forays, and an interesting programme of talks.

Jill Bailey

Your Newsletter

This is my last newsletter as editor. To my amazement when I looked back through the programmes I discovered that I took over from Catherine Ross in 1983 and that my first newsletter as editor was no. 38! In those days I typed out all the reports and contributions on my sister's portable typewriter, then did a cut-and-paste job to fit them together using a standardized A4 front page which was blank except for a green stripe across the top with the lettering WEST OXFORDSHIRE FIELD CLUB in it. This continued until 2002 when the format was changed to a stapled A3 booklet which was printed on the then sophisticated new photocopier at Burford Community College. In the meantime the typewriter was abandoned once I had access to a computer and could cut and paste electronically. The present format started in 2004 when our logo was introduced and Jill Bailey took on writing the

editorial. I thank all members, past and present, who have diligently written up reports of walks and visits organised by the Club, sharing them with others through the newsletter. Without you there would have been no newsletter!

Jill has agreed to take on the editorship. Please send her your observations, comments, etc. on anything associated with wildlife and the countryside, as well as your reports of walks and trips that have been made by the Field Club or with any other like-minded group by **the end of March 2015**. Ideally Jill would like to receive your contributions by e-mail as an attachment. Her e-mail address is j.bailey@ecofeatures.co.uk. If you are not able to do that please write out your report clearly and send it to her by post to the address given on the programme.

Brenda Betteridge (Newsletter Editor)

Fundraising for the Field Club

Thanks to your generosity the Field Club's finances have been boosted by £173.70 (£98.70 at the plant and book sale at the May meeting and £75 from the raffle organised by David Roberts at the Summer Party).

REPORTS OF FIELD MEETINGS

Dawn Chorus at Cornbury Park 11 May 2014

At 4 am it was cool, overcast and windy when eight of us met at Finstock. Birds were late in starting to sing, the first one, a Tawny Owl, didn't call until 4.33 am. We were sure that we also heard its young calling, too. The main chorus didn't start until we reached one of the small lakes situated in a dip surrounded by mature woodland. It was stirring, but comprised only the songs of Robins, Song

Thrushes and Blackbirds. It became much quieter as we walked on, with the occasional songs and calls of Wrens, Blue and Great Tits, and Chaffinches. A Treecreeper called persistently, but was very elusive in the now leafy deciduous trees and wasn't seen, but a family party of Long-tailed Tits, which gave themselves away initially with their chirrupy calls, was soon seen. The extensive areas of

Bluebells were well past their best but the swathes of Wild Garlic were spectacular. On the walk back to the cars, a Whitethroat, a couple of Chiffchaffs and a Willow Warbler sang and, closer to human habitation, one of a pair of Collared Doves was singing ‘united, united’, like a hoarse football supporter.

Birdsong had been scarce, with a total of only 19 different species logged, no doubt due to the weather, because with the mix of habitats – open farmland, ancient broad-leafed woodland and water – there was bound to be more species breeding here than just those we heard.

List of bird species logged, with the time the first of each was encountered

04.33 Tawny Owl	05.22 Blue Tit	05.45 Long-tailed Tit
04.35 Robin	05.30 Coal Tit	06.18 Carrion Crow
04.37 Song Thrush	05.32 Chaffinch	06.25 Whitethroat
04.39 Blackbird	05.33 Great Tit	06.30 Chiffchaff
04.40 Pheasant	05.38 Wood Pigeon	06.37 Willow Warbler
05.05 Treecreeper	05.40 Blackcap	06.38 Collared Dove
05.20 Wren		

David Rolfe

Upton 16 May 2014

A small group of four of us set off down Middle Lane, Upton, on a lovely calm evening. We were greeted by the raucous cawing of Rooks from a large rookery in the entrance farm garden. On the driveway a quite confiding male Bullfinch was searching for food – a nice sighting. It only flew off when a car came into the farm.

On our return we were wonderfully entertained by two young mares in a field by the cars. They galloped up and down for some time, rearing, mock fighting and biting, and pushing against each other, then coming to greet us over the wall. Then off they went again, tearing up and down their field. It really was a lovely sight.

Plants:	Crab Apple	Birds	Blackbird	Robin
Moon Daisy	Greater Knapweed	(h = heard)	Chaffinch (h)	Swallow ×3
Cow Parsley (Kek)	Black Bryony	Collared Dove	Red Kite	
White Deadnettle	Wood Avens	Rooks (nesting)	Dunnock (h)	Insects:
White Campion	Lady’s Bedstraw	Bullfinch	Linnet	Buff-tailed
Greater Stitchwort	Cleavers	Mute Swan	Pheasant	Bumble-bee
Herb Robert	Field Forget-me-not	Coot	Greenfinch	Mayfly
Yellow Flag	Cowslip	Mallard	Goldfinch	Small
Horse Radish	Garlic Mustard	Lapwing	Yellowhammer	Tortoiseshell
Comfrey	Red Campion	Blackcap	Cormorant	
Germander Speedwell	Ground Ivy	Wood Pigeon	Song Thrush	Mammals:
Bluebell		Skylark	Moorhen	Hares × 5
				Roe Deer

Alison Weaver

Taston 1 June 2014

We had a good turn-out for the walk around Taston which was expertly led by Ken Betteridge. The route took us through several different habitats – arable fields, damp and dry grasslands, woodland and village, and by a stream. This is reflected in the relatively large number of different plants I was able to record. We were delighted to see Herb Paris holding its purplish black berry above a whorl of four leaves in the woodland just off the path. Nearby was a tall allium plant in bud which I could not identify. Alison found a fumatory growing at the edge of an arable field which turned out to be Common Ramping Fumatory.

The only other place I have seen this plant growing is outside North Leigh Church.

Unfortunately the promise of tea and cakes by Ann Timbs afterwards at her home where the walk started and ended did not materialise as she spent the day at the John Radcliffe Hospital with her husband following an accident on the farm. We were relieved later that evening to learn that he had not been seriously affected.

We all enjoyed the walk on this warm sunny afternoon in an area not previously visited by many club members.

Plant list (some not in flower):

Annual Meadow-grass	Dandelion	Herb Robert	Self-heal
Barren Brome	Dog Rose	Hoary Plantain	Sheep's Fescue
Bittersweet	Dog's Mercury	Hogweed	Shepherd's Purse
Black Bryony	Dogwood	Ivy-leaved Speedwell	Silverweed
Black Horehound	Dovesfoot Cranesbill	Knotgrass	Small Sweet-grass
Black Medick	Elder	Lady's Bedstraw	Smooth Meadow-grass
Blackthorn	Enchanter's Nightshade	Lesser Burdock	Soft Brome
Bluebell	Fairy Flax	Lesser Celandine	Spear Thistle
Bramble	False Brome	Lesser Pond Sedge	Square-stemmed Willowherb
Broad-leaved Dock	Fat Hen	Lesser Water Parsnip	Stinging Nettle
Broad-leaved Willowherb	Field Bindweed	Marsh Foxtail	Sun Spurge
Brooklime	Field Forget-me-not	Marsh Marigold	Sweet Violet
Bugle	Field Madder	Marsh Thistle	Swine-cress
Bulbous Buttercup	Field Maple	Meadow Buttercup	Thyme-leaved Speedwell
Bush Vetch	Garlic Mustard	Meadow Cranesbill	Traveller's Joy
Cleavers	Germander Speedwell	Meadow Foxtail	Upright Brome
Cock's-foot	Giant Fescue	Meadow Vetchling	Water Figwort
Coltsfoot	Glaucous Sedge	Meadowsweet	Water Forget-me-not
Common Chickweed	Great Horsetail	Nipplewort	Water Mint
Common Daisy	Great Willowherb	Ox-eye Daisy	Way-faring Tree
Common Dog Violet	Greater Knapweed	Perennial Ryegrass	Welsh Poppy
Common Knapweed	Greater Plantain	Pignut	Wetted Thistle
Common Mallow	Greater Stitchwort	Pineappleweed	White Campion
Common Mouse-ear	Ground Ivy	Primrose	White Clover
Common Ragwort	Groundsel	Ragged Robin	White Dead-nettle
Common Ramping-fumatory	Hairy Brome	Red Campion	Wild Angelica
Common Reed	Hairy St John's-wort	Red Clover	Wild Arum
Common Sorrel	Hartstongue	Red Dead-nettle	Wild Carrot
Common Vetch	Hawthorn	Ribwort Plantain	Wild Parsnip

Cow Parsley
 Cowslip
 Creeping Buttercup
 Creeping Cinquefoil
 Creeping Jenny
 Creeping Thistle
 Cut-leaved Cranesbill

Hazel
 Hedge Bedstraw
 Hedge Bindweed
 Hedge Mustard
 Hedge Woundwort
 Herb Bennet
 Herb Paris

Rough Chervil
 Rough Hawksbeard
 Rough Meadow-grass
 Rough Sow-thistle
 Sainfoin
 Salad Burnet
 Sanicle

Wild Strawberry
 Wild Teasel
 Wood Meadow-grass
 Wood Speedwell
 Yarrow
 Yorkshire Fog

Brenda Betteridge

Photos taken on the walk at Taston by Mary Elford



Herb Paris



Horsetail forest



Larva of Drinker moth

Wytham Woods 26 June 2014

After such a lovely June it was very disappointing when it turned into a very heavy downpour for our evening walk at Wytham with the extremely entertaining and knowledgeable Nigel Fisher who had given us a fascinating and thought provoking talk back in the winter programme. However, despite the weather about 14 members and non-members turned out and splashed their way round with umbrellas and cagoules.

Wytham Woods are an area of ancient semi-natural woodland to the west of Oxford, owned by the University of Oxford and used for environmental research.

The woods were bequeathed to Oxford University in 1942 by the Ffennel family after the death of their only daughter Hazel. The University agreed to maintain the natural beauty of the woods to allow their continued use for education and research and that the woods be enjoyed by the inhabitants of Oxford.

Wytham Woods (390 hectares) contain a variety of habitats including semi-natural woodland, secondary woodland plantations as well as calcareous grasslands, a valley-side mire, an arable weed plot and a variety of ponds. The SSSI citation states that the site has an exceptionally rich flora and fauna, with over 500 species of vascular plants and 800 species of butterflies and moths.

Wytham Woods are one of the most researched areas of woodland in the world. Wytham has a wealth of long-term biological data, with bird data dating back for over 60 years, (particularly the long-term contribution made by Dr Andy Gosler on Great Tits), badger data for over 30 years and climate change data for the last 18 years.

A number of us retired to the White Hart in the village afterwards to dry out and warm up.

David Roberts

City Farm, Eynsham 4 July 2014

After a spell of lovely summer weather, Friday night was looking uninviting with a cool wind and dark clouds. Should we take our wellies, take a coat, a hat and/or an umbrella for a walk around a farm just a few fields north of the A40? As we congregated it was obvious a wide range of decisions had been made, a few were optimistic and were in shirt sleeves, while others came fully prepared for rain and a cooler temperature than of late.

Alan Larkman welcomed us and explained that although he didn't own one square foot of this land he was fortunate to be able to apply some influences on how the farm would be worked. The practices Alan is encouraging the farmer to use are very much as they were in the middle of the last century when many of us were children, playing and helping out in farmer's fields. How agriculture has changed since then!

The 80-acre farm is managed as an organic holding, the most productive fields being used for growing cereals. With no artificial fertilizers and sprays being applied the yield is reduced but as the input costs are low these cultivated fields just about make a profit. Several of the poorer fields have been taken out of cultivation and now support acid grassland which is cut for hay after the seeds have been set. Alan has experimented with managing the permanent grassland meadows. These are a challenging area for farming as the glacial drift heavy clays give poor drainage and frequent wet boggy areas. In one especially wet area he would love to establish a plant community dominated by Flag Irises.

Alan is particularly interested in birds and he made reference to how he has influenced the management of the fields to support the small farm-land birds in what is known as the 'hungry gap'. This is the result of the now accepted usual practice of sowing cereals in the autumn and spraying out the arable plants which produce the seed on which the birds depend for food over winter into

spring. This has led to a big reduction in the numbers of small birds in the countryside. By using an organic approach, coupled with spring sowing, small arable plants can flower on until the weather gets too cold, providing food for birds.

Part of a rather wet upper field has been left fallow for several years. Here we were astonished to see Field Woundwort in great abundance. This is an arable plant which is classified as 'Near Threatened' in the Red Data Book. The rest of the large field is slowly reverting to woodland with the dominant species being oak. This could develop into 'wood pasture' as seen in Cornbury Park, parts of Blenheim Park and the New Forest where, as the trees grow, deer browse on the lower branches and then as the trees continue to grow the branches and the leaves are too high to be damaged. This is an ancient form of productive woodland, which allows cattle and sheep to graze the grass while the trees grow to maturity producing a good source of timber.

Back near where we parked the cars is an area which 30 years ago was a gravel pit. It has been back-filled with inert builders' waste and the original top soil reinstated. As the layer of top soil was rather thin in places more top soil was brought in from an unspecified location. This has resulted in a strange mixture of colonizing plants, some of which are garden plants like Opium Poppy and Larkspur. Of most interest is the large number of arable plants which have come up, their seed having survived in the original top soil. Some of these survivors are now rare.

Alan had so much to tell us and was an extremely good guide and interpreter of the many elements on the farm. I have reported on a fraction of it. What I appreciated was how he engaged with the farmers who came along, wishing to hear their interpretations on how they would solve some of his challenges and when he didn't know the answer to a question put to him he turned it around.

At one point on the circuit we realised that, despite being so near to Eynsham and the A40, we could see no building or hear any traffic noise. What a haven for wildlife! Long may it flourish under Alan's enlightened

guidance. Thank you, Alan for giving up so much of your valuable time to take us round the farm and share your enthusiasm and dedication with us.

Ken Betteridge

Plant list (some not in flower):

Alsike Clover	Field Bindweed	Lesser Trefoil	Smooth Hawksbeard
Annual Knawel*	Field Forget-me-not	Many-seeded Goosefoot	Smooth Sow-thistle
Annual Meadow-grass	Field Madder	Marsh Cudweed	Smooth Tare
Barren Brome	Field Maple	Marsh Thistle	Soft Rush
Bifid Hemp-nettle	Field Penny-cress*	Marsh Willowherb	Spear Thistle
Black Bindweed	Field Rose	Marsh Woundwort	Stinging Nettle
Black Grass	Field Woundwort*	Meadow Buttercup	Sun Spurge
Black Medick	Fool's Parsley	Meadow Vetchling	Sweet Vernal-grass
Black Nightshade	Garlic Mustard	Meadowsweet	Swine-cress
Bramble	Germander Speedwell	Mugwort	Thyme-leaved Sandwort
Bristly Oxtongue	Gipsywort	Musk Thistle	Thyme-leaved Speedwell
Broad-leaved Willowherb	Good King Henry	Nipplewort	Timothy
Buckwheat	Great Willowherb	Ox-eye Daisy	Toad Rush
Cleavers	Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil	Parsley Piert	Wall Barley
Clustered Dock	Greater Plantain	Pineappleweed	Water Figwort
Cock's-foot	Ground Ivy	Prickly Lettuce	Water Forget-me-not
Common Fumatory	Hairy Tare	Red Bartsia	Water Mint
Common Knapweed	Hard Rush	Red Clover	Wavy Hair-grass
Common Mouse-ear	Hawthorn	Redleg	Weld
Common Poppy	Hazel	Ribwort Plantain	White Bryony
Common Ragwort	Hedge Bedstraw	Rosebay	White Dead-nettle
Common Reed	Hedge Mustard	Rough Chervil	Wild Angelica
Compact Rush	Hedge Woundwort	Sainfoin	Wild Carrot
Corn Spurrey	Hemlock	Scarlet Pimpernel	Wild Pansy*
Cow Parsley	Herb Bennet	Scented Mayweed	Wild Radish
Creeping Buttercup	Herb Robert	Scentless Mayweed	Wood Horsetail
Creeping Cinquefoil	Hoary Willowherb	Self-heal	Yarrow
Creeping Thistle	Hogweed	Shepherd's Purse	Yellow Iris
Crested Dogstail	Ivy	Silverweed	Yellow Rattle
Cut-leaved Cranesbill	Knotgrass	Slender Parsley Piert*	Yorkshire Fog
False Oat-grass	Lesser Swine-cress*	Smaller Catstail	

* Rare annuals.

Jill Bailey and Brenda Betteridge

PS. Here is Alan's response to my e-mail thanking him for giving up so much of his precious time to take us on a conducted tour of City Farm.

Brenda

‘I was surprised and delighted that so many people came, although my heart did sink a bit when the rain started. However, everyone (at least outwardly) seemed to just shrug it off admirably. If you ever get the chance, please thank your members from me for being such stalwarts and for all their interesting and intelligent comments, questions and suggestions. With a couple of days’ hindsight, I can see that just putting things into words, and listening to everyone’s comments, has helped me clarify a number of things in my own mind.’

Swinbrook 15 July 2014

Nine members and two visitors joined me at the starting place near Swinbrook Church on a fine evening. The plan was to have a circular walk via Widford, finishing up at The Swan for a drink while we waited for it to get dark enough to look for Glow-worms (which are actually bioluminescent beetles) in the churchyard. This was a favourite summer evening event for the Club for many years. Recently the numbers of Glow-worms seen had been very small, and we hadn’t been for a while. John and I did our own Glow-worm walk at about the same time last year and to our surprise found seven Glow-worms in the churchyard, so I suggested that we gave it another try with the Club.

We headed off along the footpath from our meeting point towards Widford, pausing to admire some handsome Cotswold rams. The rear guard of our group found a large group of Small Tortoiseshells on a stone wall. After looking at the river at Widford, we followed the bridleway up to the lane, over Handley Plain and back to the village down the lane. After a drink at the pub, we took John’s bat detector out to the bridge over the Windrush. It was a warm evening and bats were out in force, swooping over the water. The bat detector reduces their high-pitched sounds to a level that we can hear, usually a series of clicks, becoming more rapid as the bat nears its prey.

We then headed up to the churchyard. Even though the grass had been cut and the moon was quite bright, we still found four Glow-worms. I am always amazed at their bright greenish light. It is the female Glow-worm that does the glowing to attract a mate. On a return visit 10 days later, John and I found none, so presumably they had all been successful.



Plants:

Spear Thistle	Field Scabious
Cherry Plums (ripe!)	White Clover
Pineappleweed	Red Clover
Meadowsweet	Greater Knapweed
Great Willowherb	White Bryony
Ivy-leaved Toadflax	Black Bryony
Hemp Agrimony	Tall Mellilot
Black Horehound	White Mellilot
Self-heal	Burdock
Birdsfoot Trefoil	Madder
Hop Trefoil	Mugwort
Bistort	Yarrow
Meadow Cranesbill	Lady’s Bedstraw
	Bramble

Wild Clematis
Common Hemp-nettle
Wild Liquorice
Musk Thistle
Ragwort
Woolly Thistle
Teasel
White Champion
Harebell
Creeping Thistle
Hedge Bedstraw
Cinquefoil
Hemlock
White Deadnettle

Birds:

Swift
House Martin
Wood Pigeon
Robin
Mallard
Song Thrush
Kestrel
Tawny Owl (seen and heard)
Sparrowhawk
Little Owl (heard)
Mammals:
Bats
Hedgehog

Hogweed
Hedge Woundwort
Marjoram

Field Bindweed
Wild Arum (berries)
Rest Harrow

Musk Mallow

Insects:

Small Tortoiseshell
Ground beetle (?Violet – too dark to tell)
Glow-worms

Sue Morton

Icomb 3 August 2014

There I was, sitting on a bench in the centre of Icomb, an attractive small Cotswold village, at the appointed time for my second walk of the summer season. The sun shone and the bees buzzed, and there was absolutely nobody else around. I was just wondering whether to go home or set off on my own, when Tony and Alison arrived. The three of us set off for our 3-mile circular walk and managed a reasonable haul of plants. There weren't that many birds around, as you might expect given the time of

year, but quite a few butterflies and other insects, including a number of very fresh Magpie Moths.

The interesting grassland by the Westcote Brook on the way back was a little past its best, but there was still a good display of Great Burnet. It was a warm day, and we stopped for a rest before tackling the uphill climb back to Icomb. We enjoyed a welcome cup of tea and some cake kindly supplied by my fellow walkers before going home.

Plants:

Spear Thistle
Great Willowherb
White Clover
Red Bartsia
Hedge Woundwort
Hogweed
Lesser Knapweed
Meadowsweet
Common Mallow
Oxeye Daisy
Guelder Rose
Dogwood
Lady's Bedstraw
Mayweed
Honeysuckle
Meadow Buttercup
Black Bryony
Hedge Bindweed

Woody Nightshade
White Deadnettle
Wood Avens
Red Campion
Bramble
Wood Sedge
Tufted Vetch
Marsh Thistle
Ragwort
Rosebay Willowherb
Meadow Cranesbill
Birdsfoot Trefoil
Great Burnet
Field Bindweed
Common Fleabane
Bistort
Purple Loostrike
Wild Arum (berries)
Goosegrass

Cinquefoil
Self-heal
Robin's Pincushion Gall
on Dog Rose
Pineappleweed
Duckweed
Red Clover
St John's Wort
Meadow Vetchling
Creeping Thistle
Common Mousear

Birds (*= heard):

Yellowhammer
Wood Pigeon
Wren
Jay
Swallow
Long-tailed Tit
Green Woodpecker*
Little Grebes

Insects:

Large Skipper
Gatekeeper
Meadow Brown
Small Skipper
Large White
Speckled Wood
Marbled White
Peacock
Ringlet
Small Tortoiseshell
Magpie Moth
A green grasshopper
A red dragonfly

Miscellaneous:

Hare
Frog

Sue Morton

Watlington Hill 24 August 2014

Our party of eight members hoping to see the Silver-spotted Skipper were doubtless disappointed when they heard the weather forecast before they departed for the venue:

8 Celsius and cloudy. This species does not usually fly until the temperature reaches 21 Celsius! In addition, they had emerged

2 weeks earlier than average this year, so the expectation was that the likelihood of seeing them on 24 August would be rather remote anyway. Needless to say we saw none, as the forecast turned out to be accurate.

Watlington Hill is a Site of Special Scientific Interest owned by the National Trust. The sward on this chalk grassland site is very short thanks to the presence of large numbers of Rabbits. Sheep's Fescue, the sole food-plant of the caterpillars of the Silver-spotted Skipper, is also present. There are also plenty of Stemless Thistles to provide nectar in the late summer for the Silver-spotted Skipper. Despite its absence, we did see six other species of butterfly: Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell, Meadow Brown, Common Blue, Brown Argus and a single Small Heath, well-spotted by Alison shortly before we left. This formerly very common species is in decline on most sites. It has been a good year for Common Blue and Brown Argus at most sites.

Continuing with Lepidoptera, there were plenty of micro-moths, none of which could be identified, but we did see a single Treble Bar, a day-flying macro-moth. This species is common here in the summer months. Several Saddleback Harvestmen (arachnids closely-related to spiders) were seen.

There were several sightings of Red Kites, but few other bird species were seen,

although Green and Greater Spotted Woodpecker were heard. The highlight of the visit was definitely the flora. Particularly notable was the presence of perhaps a hundred Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*) plants on the edge of the yew wood on the south-west side of the hill. A few of the plants were still in flower, despite the presence of green unripe berries as well as a few black ripe berries. We discovered three plants of the uncommon Wild Candytuft, *Iberis amara* on the west side of the hill. One was still in flower and the other two were covered with ripening seed. Another interesting find was several Ploughman's Spikenard (*Inula conyza*) which is only found on dry calcareous soil.

Between the summit and the car park at the east end of the site we were surprised to find five Frog orchids, *Dactylorhiza viridis* (syn. *Coeloglossum viride*). Their seedpods were swollen with unripe seed. We also found a significant number of Autumn Gentians (*Gentianella amarella*). This is a biennial whose leaves grow in the first year, and the flowering stems in the second.

A few minutes after leaving, it started to rain. This gave a strange feeling of comfort, as we had a good afternoon and missed the worst of the weather.

Malcolm Brownsword

Plants:	Deadly Nightshade
Hedge Woundwort	Yellow-wort
Herb Robert	Birdsfoot Trefoil
Marjoram	Mignonette
Harebell	Wood Nightshade
Greater Knapweed	Dark Mullein
Field Scabious	Wild Candytuft
St John's-wort	Yarrow
Eyebright	Frog Orchid
Ploughman's Spikenard	Restharrow
Carline Thistle	Red Bartsia
Red Clover	Greater Willowherb
Heath Bedstraw	Vervain
Autumn Gentian	

Birds:
 Martin
 Swallow
 Red Kite ×3
 Green Woodpecker

Butterflies:
 Meadow Brown
 Common Blue
 Brimstone (male)
 Brown Argus
 Small Heath
 Small Tortoiseshell
 Speckled Wood

Moths and other insects:
 Cinnabar Moth caterpillars
 Treble Bar Moth
 Ladybird

Miscellaneous:
 Large black slug

Fungi:
Boletus cyanescens
 (probably)

Photos taken by Malcolm at Watlington



Pair of Common Blues, one with a red mite



Felwort (Autumn Gentian)



Wild Candytuft

MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Owl Watching in the Car at Ramsden Crossroads

We first saw the Barn Owls on 22 July. We went back the next evening to see if they were in the same area. And they were. We have been back regularly to see them, often three or more at a time, and have seen some interesting behaviours.

One night we were parked in the usual place on the grass verge when a Rabbit came out of the field and crouched down about 8 feet in front of the car. The owls were circling about and one spotted the Rabbit. It swooped down with its talons fully extended but realised its intended prey was too big and flew off. This was right in front of us – it would have made a superb photograph.

Another time an owl was in a small Horse Chestnut tree directly opposite us. Another owl was flying round the tree noisily ‘clacking’ its wings, seemingly to drive out the sitting owl which eventually was driven off and flew away.

Another time three owls were chasing each other. They circled round making loud

‘churring’ noises, flying back and forth, often just a few feet above the open roof of the car. It is likely that the fully grown young were being driven away by their parents to find their own territory.

We also had two Tawny Owls calling, perched just above the car. A Hare often came out of the field just at dusk, taking no notice of us.

We have also seen up to 14 Fallow Deer, including a large stag, charging about the field opposite. A pure white fully grown doe was in the herd as well. On returning home near to Wood Lane, Hailey, the deer sometimes cross the narrow road in front of our headlights. One largish fawn almost panicked one night but soon followed the herd.

Just at dusk we also saw one, sometimes a pair of Hobbies, flying characteristically very fast indeed across the sky – a marvellous sight. In this very low light I must assume they were hunting bats. It was far too dark for Swallows or Martins their normal prey.

Alison Weaver

Dix Pit Recycling Centre

Once or twice a year I have enough garden waste – about 16 bags of hedge clippings – to make a trip to the Dix Pit recycling centre, *aka* ‘the tip’, worthwhile. Usually this is in early or mid-July (though I was a bit late this year). I’ve made the odd trip in winter too, which is better for birds. Over the years I have found that it’s worth taking a pair of binoculars and walking around the old gravel pit, now a lake. Access is signposted down the ‘haul road’ off the Hardwick–Stanton Harcourt road; there is a small area, blocked off with some old tyres, on the left at the north end where you can park and a small parking area just beyond the actual recycling zone. There used to be a picnic table there and a good view over the lake but now the vegetation has grown too tall. There is a marked and well-maintained footpath which leads from there and goes most of the way around the lake. An unexpected highlight, also signposted, a short way around is ‘The Devil’s Quoits’, a reconstructed circle of 30 or so standing stones a metre or so high. It comes as

quite a shock when you’re not expecting it; apparently stone circles are not uncommon along the Thames valley. The area is good for ducks in winter (a telescope helps) and warblers in summer; it is listed as one of four top sites in Oxfordshire by The Fat Birder and is an OCC local wildlife site. There is a heronry on one of the islands and I have seen as many as ten herons and eight egrets at one time. The sandy soil supports its own flora, in particular a huge crop of Common Centaury, and the margins are favoured by butterflies and spectacular swarms of blue damselflies in July. I’m not sure that it’s worth a trip in its own right but if you do happen to be recycling, then it’s certainly worth spending half an hour or so looking around. The only drawback, which the fauna don’t seem to mind at all, is the faint whiff from the nearby landfill site!

The species list is the result of a number of short visits over several years with (of course) some help from Sue.

Birds:	
Buzzard	Goldeneye
Red Kite	Mandarin (? – a long way off)
Heron	Great Crested Grebe
Little Egret	Cormorant
Coot	Black-headed Gull
Canada Goose	Herring Gull
Mute Swan	Oystercatcher
Mallard	Lapwing
Wigeon	House Martin
Pochard	Garden Warbler
Teal	Sedge Warbler
Gadwall	Cetti’s Warbler
Shoveller	Chiffchaff
Tufted Duck	Willow Warbler
Pintail	Magpie
	Reed Bunting

Flowers:
Corncockle
Common Centaury
Tormentil
Creeping Cinquefoil
Birdsfoot Trefoil
Bristly Oxtongue
Self-heal
Perforate St John’s-wort

Insects & butterflies:
A blue damselfly
Large White
Marbled White
Ringlet
Meadow Brown
Skipper
Small Heath
Common Blue
Small Tortoiseshell

John Cobb, August 2014