

West Oxfordshire Field Club



www.thefieldclub.org.uk

Newsletter No. 110 Autumn 2019

EDITORIAL

The field meeting year began with a frosty dawn chorus and ended with a balmy evening bat walk. While the summer ended in long periods of hot days and blue skies, there was enough ill-timed rain to force us to cancel the moth morning. For those of us with gardens, it will be remembered as the butterfly summer, with a wide variety of species thriving, and a wonderful invasion of Painted Ladies from Africa (via the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea). The last time I remember seeing these attractive butterflies was on a Field Club trip to Cheddar Gorge in search of the Cheddar Pink. In Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly count the Painted Lady was the most seen species, followed by the Peacock (with only half the number). The Count



Painted lady -Jill Bailey

corresponded with the emergence of the home-grown generation sired by the immigrants that arrived earlier in the year.

The skies quieted early this year – the local swallows and martins left almost two weeks early. Barely a week into September we had the first frost here. Flocks of long-tailed tits are roaming the gardens in search of small insects and seeds. The local geese have their autumn restlessness, wheeling around in great noisy flocks at sunset in what may once have been pre-migration behaviour. The noisiest have been a large flock of Snow Geese that come through when it is almost dark. Many geese migrate at night. Since they don't soar on thermals like buzzards and eagles, the thermals that form during the day are obstacles to smooth flight. It's cooler at night, and flight muscles generate a lot of heat. And those birds of prey are not the best travelling companions, so it pays to travel when they don't.

While most people would be distressed to find a bird nest full of plastic, it seems that for black kites a nest decorated in white plastic makes a big statement. The birds with the best territory and the most chicks have the largest collections of plastic. When researchers tried

adding plastic to the nests of weaker, old or younger kites, these birds removed it, suggesting that more powerful birds might have attacked them if they had created a display incompatible with their own ability to defend it. It hasn't taken long for collecting plastic to be selected for!

Now spiders of all shapes and sizes are appearing in unexpected places, and Daddy-long-legs (and wasps) are bouncing at the windows in search of a way in. Squirrels are dashing about burying nuts regardless of the approaching traffic. I spotted one youngster "frozen" half-way across a narrow wire suspended above the A40, peering nervously at the road, its tail dangling, perhaps wishing it had been less adventurous. On the Chilterns autumn colours appear to be forming, but closer inspection reveals that the leaves are dried and curled up rather than simply gold and brown – an indication of the drought we are experiencing. Many of the smaller streams are almost dried up. Driving after dark I am struck by the absence of moths on the windscreen – I haven't had to clean off a single one. In my early days of driving

through the countryside the screen would be bombarded so heavily that I often had to stop to clean it.

While some members of the Field Club could luxuriate in the multitude of plant and insect species on their trip to Teesdale, closer to home we have enjoyed the colourful flora of the limestone grassland at Hook Norton and Stonesfield Common, and the brilliant floral displays on carefully managed farmland at Over Norton Park Farm, where poppies and *Phacelia* dominate the uncultivated field margins. We have also made the most of the warm evenings this summer gifted us, with late evening walks to see glow worms and bats.

We are very grateful to the walk leaders and speakers whose generosity makes it possible to enjoy a varied programme of activities throughout the year. We'd also like to thank the Shilton ladies and their helpers who provide our summer party, and the hosts of our Committee meetings, who make sure we don't go home hungry.

Jill Bailey



Over Norton park farm - Jill Bailey

REPORTS OF FIELD MEETINGS

Dawn Chorus Walk – Minster Lovell and Crawley, 5 May 2019

Eight of us turned up on a rather overcast and cool morning, with a few stars glimmering here and there and traces of white frost on the grass. Birds tended to be heard a little later than on previous visits, and it wasn't until we approached the wooden bridge over the River Windrush almost half an hour after setting out that the early songsters had started to sing. Several Tawny Owls had been competing before that, and whilst leaving the ruins we'd heard the screech of a Barn Owl over the water meadow ahead of us. We then saw it quartering the area a couple of times afterwards. Once we'd crossed the bridge and entered the trees, the chorus had really begun, with several Great Tits, Robins, Blackbirds and Song Thrushes singing their hearts out, plus a couple of Blackcaps and a Goldcrest joining in. However, until we'd reached Maggots Grove, a wooded area along the low escarpment, we hadn't heard a Chiffchaff, which was unusual. As always at this time of year, the rookery was a hive of activity with young still in or perched near their nests constantly calling, and parent birds toing and froing with food for them. After we'd emerged from the wood, we saw Buzzard and

Kestrel, heard a Skylark and a Willow Warbler, and as expected in Dry Lane, a Common Whitethroat. We paused for a little while in Roger Townsend's flower meadow to watch the antics of a mother Roe Deer and her fawn cavorting around, sending a Muntjac bounding away. On reaching the Crawley industrial estate, we added Swallow and House Sparrow to the list. Right on cue, from the road bridge over the river, an adult Grey Wagtail was flitting around over the water catching insects to feed its young waiting nearby on prominent rocks - we'd seen this here several times during past chorus walks. Through the village, several small passerine species were seen, and beyond it, along the path towards Minster Lovell, Long-tailed Tit, Yellowhammer, Lapwing, Stock Dove and another Roe Deer were logged. A Garden Warbler rounded off the walk nearer the cars. Thanks to those who came along and contributed to the count, which totalled 42 bird species, a good number and slightly more than on recent previous chorus walks. However, numbers of each individual species encountered were fewer than in previous years.

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

04.07: Pheasant	04.55: Goldcrest	06.10: Swallow
04.10: Robin	04.55: Blackcap	06.11: House sparrow
04.17: Tawny owl	05.07: Coal tit	06.15: Grey wagtail
04.18: Mallard	05.10: Carrion crow	06.18: Pied wagtail
04.22: Moorhen	05.22: Blue tit	06.36: Starling
04.24: Red-legged partridge	05.23: Dunnock	06.36: Goldfinch
04.30: Barn owl	05.26: Chiffchaff	06.37: Greenfinch
04.30: Great tit	05.37: Cormorant	06.37: Great-spotted Woodpecker
04.37: Wood pigeon	05.40: Skylark	06.41: Magpie
04.40: Jackdaw	05.41: Kestrel	06.53: Long-tailed tit
04.41: Blackbird	05.45: Buzzard	07.03: Yellowhammer
04.42: Song thrush	05.49: Willow warbler	07.10: Lapwing
04.53: Rook	05.53: Common whitethroat	07.13: Stock dove
04.54: Wren	06.07: Collared dove	07.38: Garden warbler

Singe Wood 1 June 2019

Also called St John's Wood, Singe Wood was gifted to the Wychwood project by the Payne family. Much of it is believed to be ancient woodland, but part was clear-felled during and after medieval times and is now regenerating naturally. The approach to the wood, Wood Lane, is a Roman road that would originally have been gated at both ends to allow sheep in to keep it clear. Here we noticed Spanish Bluebells and Day lilies that had been dumped. The plant list shows why ancient woodland is so prized – we recorded well over 100 species of flowering plants. This variety supports a great diversity of

insects. For example, Ground Ivy is food for Orange-tips and related butterflies, Wych Elm provides food for caterpillars of the White Letter Hairstreak, and we found a Small Tortoiseshell caterpillar on a Stinging Nettle leaf. An amusing find was a Garlic Snail, which gives off a smell of garlic when disturbed. We also found the Green Elf Cup, a fungus that produces a bright green stain used in Tunbridge-Ware, a form of decoratively inlaid woodwork. Our thanks for Martin Catt for leading the walk, and to Brenda Betteridge for compiling the plant list.

Jill Bailey



Widdybank farm, Upper Teesdale - Peter Creed

Upper Teesdale trip 7-10 June 2019

‘It’s always fun to do interesting things with like-minded eccentrics’, or so said someone during this trip. They could have added

‘despite the weather’, for it’s true to say that we were not as lucky with the weather as we could have been. Eighteen like-minded

members of the club stayed in the Teesdale Hotel in Middleton in Teesdale from the 7th to the 10th of June for the club's visit to Upper Teesdale led by Peter Creed. The few people who travelled up a day early missed the deluge on the M1 and A1M that the rest of us suffered; nobody was spared a truly biblical deluge on the way home.

Upper Teesdale is in the north Pennines and is a landscape of fells up 2200 feet and low-lying farmland alongside the Tees. The Moor House NNR is unique in Britain and includes traditionally-managed hay meadows, limestone grassland, blanket bog and heaths on the tops of the fells. The weather wasn't all bad and we managed to visit everywhere that Peter had planned. These were, in fact, much the same areas that the club visited on its last trip to Teesdale in 2010. This time we were slightly unlucky with our timing – determined by the availability of accommodation as much as anything. Early spring had come early so the early flush of flowers was almost finished; late spring was late so the late flowers were only just flowering. Even so, there was plenty to see.



Parsley Fern - John Cobb

On the Saturday morning we drove up to the Cow Green reservoir. Apart from a few fishermen there was no one else about, hardly surprising since it was wet and windy. Undeterred and armed with umbrellas, we set out alongside the reservoir towards the dam above Cauldron Snout. Despite the weather

we saw plenty of arctic-alpine flowers, including (a few) Teesdale Violets near the car park, Alpine Pansies in plenty, Sundews and lots of Butterworts. One of the things that I shall remember about this trip is the sheer number of Butterworts that we saw, although you don't have to go to Teesdale to see them – a few weeks later we found some at Parsonage Moor, near Abingdon. It was blowing a gale and a couple of us sheltered Peter with our umbrellas while he photographed Alpine Meadow Rue growing on the banks of Red Syke (a broad, shallow stream). Meanwhile, a few people who were feeling chilly went for a brisk walk to the top of the dam to warm up. Luckily everyone had read the report of the last trip which warned of how cold it can get at Cow Green and had brought appropriate clothing. With great foresight Brenda Betteridge, who acted as species recorder, came equipped with a rather neat waterproof clipboard, just the job for such days!

After a quick lunch back at the cars, by which time it had stopped raining and the wind had dropped, we drove down to Widdy Bank. The rain held off and we set off along the track towards Widdy Bank farm, stopping to look in the fields and wet meadows. Being lower down, the flora was completely different. There were still lots of Pansies but also Northern Marsh and Early Marsh Orchids, some splendid heads of purple/mauve Marsh Lousewort, and Water Avens. Someone spotted a Moonwort – a diminutive type of fern – and once we got our eyes in we found lots of it. Peter pointed out Marsh Valerian, which is dioecious: it has male and female flowers on different plants with the male flowers about twice the size of the female flowers. The meadows close to Widdy Bank farm weren't yet in full flower although there was some Yellow Rattle and a lot of Pignut. All the time we were looking at the flowers

we were treated to aerial displays by the Lapwings that were nesting in the area. Most of the group didn't go as far as the farm but sensibly retreated to Middleton. Sue and I continued beside the Tees towards the bottom of Cauldron Snout in the hope of seeing a Ring Ousel, a cousin of the Blackbird that inhabits upland areas. When the rain came on again – with a vengeance – we started to envy the tea and cake that the others might be enjoying, and turned back and soon saw a pair of Ring Ousels, one male and one female; there were also Curlews aplenty.

After supper Sue and I walked down to the bridge in Middleton to look for bats but the river was flowing fast and although we heard a few it didn't seem to be a good foraging ground for them.

Sunday morning was dry although the Tees had risen by a couple of feet overnight and was the colour of strong tea. Parking near the school in Forest in Teesdale we set off towards Cronkley Fell. There was a spectacular clump of Blood Spot Emlets (*mimulus*) – possibly the ones seen on the previous trip – on the banks of a small stream and Redshanks everywhere – in the meadows, and sitting on walls and posts. We saw our first Dipper where the track crossed the river on a wide bridge. Shortly afterwards we met a large group of teenagers carrying camping equipment. It turned out that they were on a Duke of Edinburgh expedition and, although they admitted to being rather soggy, they seemed remarkably cheerful. By now the sun was beginning to shine. There was a spectacular display of Globe Flowers on a bank where Peter showed us a species of Click Beetle with long feathery antennae. We then climbed up quite steeply to an area of Juniper scrub where we hoped to find Juniper Shield Bugs but we were out of luck.

Some of the group decided that the going was a bit strenuous and returned to the river where they enjoyed the sunshine and watched Dippers. The rest of us continued to the top of Cronkley Fell, Peter pointing out interesting Bryophytes on the rocks on the way up, including Devil's Matchstick Lichen, which through a hand lens looks like miniature 'Swan' matches. Appropriately enough, Candle Snuffer Moss was growing nearby.

We ate lunch in the shelter of some rocks near the summit; Parsley Fern – a rather attractive plant – was growing in the cracks in the rocks. I put up a couple of Grouse and on the top we had a fine sight of some Golden Plovers. Cronkley Fell is grazed and the interesting flora is enclosed for protection. In one of the enclosures we found a number of Spring Gentians, all gone over except one which had two blue petals left (out of five!) – a pity because Gentians are perhaps the best-known Teesdale speciality. In fact, a stained glass window behind the bar in the hotel featured a very large Gentian. In other enclosures we found Mountain Avens, and species of *Alchemilla* and Hoary Rock Rose which are unique to Teesdale. There were plenty of Butterworts in the wetter places, and a lot of Spring Sandwort, a small attractive plant with white flowers, fully open.



Click Beetle -*Ctenicera pectinicornis*- Peter Creed

After closely inspecting, and admiring through a lens, various Bryophytes, we retraced our steps back to Forest in Teesdale.

John Baker had brought a geologist's hammer and explained some of the rocks and 'bioturbation', which is the name for the wiggly markings made, millions of years ago, by small creatures in sedimentary rocks. There were some good examples in the paving slabs which had been laid on the wetter sections of the path. The last three of us stopped at the river and had excellent views of several Dippers, one of which had caught a small fish. Back at the car park the mystery of the rather monotonous tweeting that we had heard in the morning was solved with the help of a photograph taken by Malcolm. It turned out to be a Willow Warbler, probably with young nearby.

Later in the evening Sue and I went back to the bridge in Middleton. The Tees had gone down and was quiet. As we watched, many bats emerged from beneath the arches. We rushed back to the hotel for our bat detectors and it turned out to be bat heaven. Whilst it's very difficult to be absolutely certain simply by hearing their calls, we were fairly sure that there at least three species: Noctules, Pipistrelles at head height and Daubenton's skimming over the stiller pools. Some people left straight after breakfast on Monday morning but the remainder of us went to Bowlees Nature Reserve. The habitat there is more familiar, with a woods and a stream, and an old quarry. It was rather busy with a number of school parties but there was plenty to see, including Yellow Brain Fungus (it looks like its name suggests!) growing on an Ash sapling. The old quarry was rewarding with Common Spotted Orchids, Twayblades, more Butterworts, the rather unpleasant looking Dog Lichen, and a splendid display of yellow Crosswort on the rock faces. After the quarry we walked up to the waterfall at Gibson's Cave where a very busy Dipper was flying up and down the stream, regularly disappearing into some very damp-looking

moss behind the waterfall where it must have had a nest. After that we all went our separate ways, a few people visiting High Force before heading south.



Dipper with Stone Loach - John Cobb

Middleton in Teesdale is very pleasant small town with a certain civic pride. No one failed to notice that it had been comprehensively 'yarn-bombed'. Every lamp-post, bollard, seat, and anything else that didn't move was adorned with a piece of knitting. Some of them were real virtuoso (if that's the word) examples. One bollard was capped with a knitted blackbird sitting on a knitted egg in a knitted nest; the bollards outside the chippy were ornamented with fish, shellfish and octopuses. Nothing had escaped! As far as we could tell it was all done for fun by a group of local ladies known as the 'Knitter-Natters'. Their efforts certainly gave us something to talk about!

Despite the weather, which wasn't all bad, and the distance, it was a very enjoyable trip with a creditable species count, in a lovely area – the petrol station in Mickleton where we stopped to fill up before joining the main roads must have the best view in the north of England. If anything the trip was too short. Our thanks are once again due to Peter Creed for sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm with us, and for compiling the plant list.

Over Norton Park Farm 11 June 2019

Eight members of the Field Club enjoyed a lovely evening visiting Mike and Sarah Kettlewell's farm, which is situated in rolling countryside just north of Chipping Norton. Dr Alan Larkman also joined us – he has been advising on conservation issues on this farm for many years but had never visited in the summer. We were greeted by Mike and Sarah and the first thing we saw was a large poster of photographs of the wildflowers on the farm taken by Sarah between 23 May and 3 June this year, featuring over 70 species in bloom. We knew then that we were in for a special treat. Sarah's family has owned this farm for 400 years.

The farm is 400 acres with a pedigree herd of South Devon cattle, mixed arable crops and some woodland. It has been in Stewardship schemes for 15 years to increase biodiversity, all the arable fields have uncultivated margins and there are impressive native hedgerows that are trimmed only every 3 years – in one of them I counted 10 hedgerow species. There is a year-round feeding programme for vulnerable farmland birds that have declined so badly over the last 5 decades and to support this, 15 acres on the farm are sown for birdseed. There are hanging feeders of millet year-round to help Tree Sparrows and Reed

Buntings. From late December to early May there is ground feeding to attract Chaffinches, Yellowhammers, Linnets, Skylarks and Corn Buntings plus the usual hedgerow birds. Yellow Rattle is introduced to the feeding areas to keep down the grass and make the seeds more accessible to the birds. In places, double hedges with a ditch in the middle, cut back every three years, help provide shelter and nesting sites. The remains of medieval fishponds support reedbeds and birds such as Little Grebes, Cormorants, Kingfishers, a colony of Reed Buntings and some Sedge Warblers.

Mike and Sarah led us on an amble around the farm, including through a beautiful meadow where Spotted Orchids were in flower. In the last field the cattle were grazing including the impressive bull who was sitting contentedly surrounded by his ladies and their calves. Your scribe watched in amazement as Mike and Sarah went over to him, stroking him and talking to him as if he were a pet cat!

Our thanks to Mike and Sarah for their hospitality. In our coming winter programme is a visit to the farm, hopefully to see a good range of farmland birds.

Mary Elford

Swift Awareness Walk at Shilton 21 June 2019

The Swifts!

Forty people turned up for our swift walk on a warm still evening. We were lucky to have local expert Chris Mason and had a lovely few hours watching the swifts in their screaming parties around the village. This was one of many events across the country taking

place for Swift Awareness Week. This has helped to raise awareness about the Swift nest sites under the Stonesfield roof tiles and how we can protect them when doing maintenance. Some villagers have installed Swift boxes to encourage new nesting sites.

David Roberts

Hook Norton walk 26 June 2019

Ten people enjoyed a visit to a species-rich grassland bank (SSSI) and adjacent field. The field was thick with a great variety of flowers and the vivid orange, yellow and green colours made a thrilling impact when seen for the first time. About 25 years ago this field had for many years been sprayed and fertilized in the usual way. The owner then decided to stop the arable use and restore the field to a flower meadow. This has been successful and very unusually no wildflower seeds were sown on the land.



Salad Burnet - Jill Bailey

Our leader, Craig Blackwell (former county ecologist), believes the flowers came from the field's own seed bank, which had been suppressed during the years of arable use. Once the field stopped being farmed intensively it began to flourish. It was helped



Pyramidal Orchid - Jill Bailey

by having Yellow Rattle in the field as this depleted the vigour of the grasses, enabling the wildflowers to thrive.

The SSSI had a very different character and was steep in places. Some of the species from the SSSI have begun to colonize the adjacent field. The evening was grey and cold for the time of year and in the distance we could hear a Muntjac barking.

Jonathan Noel

Dry Sandford Pit and Parsonage Moor 7 July 2019

Sixteen members attended this event at these two important BBOWT reserves. The quarrying of sand and limestone in the 1950s created the conditions which are now characteristic of Dry Sandford Pit. There are low fossil-rich limestone cliffs, limey fenland

(a rare habitat), scrub and woodland and pools and streams fed by several springs.

One would expect to find a large number of Marsh Helleborines here at this time of year and we were not disappointed, although there

were rather less than in an average year. We also found plenty of Common Spotted Orchids and a small number of Twayblades. Looking in an area where I usually find the locally rare Marsh Fragrant Orchid, we found none. However, when I visited a week later I has shown a different area where there were about twenty in flower!



Marsh Helleborine - Malcolm Brownsword

Butterflies seen were most of the common species on the wing at this time of the year, but a highlight was the well-spotted sight of a Dark Green Fritillary by Martin in the area adjoining the former RAF airfield. This species has had a very good year in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. There were also a few Six-spot Burnet Moths and a single Scarlet Tiger Moth. Some of us saw a calling Green Woodpecker here too, as well as a Green Shield Bug.

Within the marshy area, several species of Odonata (Dragonflies and Damselflies) were seen, including a pair of the rare Southern Damselfly mating. The male of this species is very similar to that of the other blue species

but can be distinguished by the presence of black markings resembling the ancient alchemy symbol for mercury on the first and second abdominal segments. This is reflected in its scientific epithet of *mercuriale*.

Dragonflies seen included a Southern Hawker and several Keeled Skimmers. Large numbers of soldier beetles were seen on the large number of Wild Parsnip plants.



Bog Pimpernel - Malcolm Brownsword

We then crossed the road and walked to Parsonage Moor, which like Dry Sandford Pit, is fed by several springs. This area is a true fen and contains rare Odonata such as the Southern Damselfly and Small Red Damselfly, both of which were seen mating. We also saw a couple of Keeled Skimmer dragonflies and many more of the much commoner Black-tailed Skimmer. Many species of fenland flowers were seen, including the insectivorous Butterwort. Particularly interesting were several groups of the beautiful Bog Pimpernel. A few Common Spotted and Pyramidal Orchids were in flower, but flowering of the Southern Marsh and the rare Pugsley's Marsh Orchid was now over.

My thanks to Sue Morton for compiling the plant species lists below.

Malcolm Brownsword



Small red damselflies mating - Malcolm Brownsword



Southern damselflies mating - Malcolm Brownsword

Over Norton Park Farm 14 July 2019

Eight members of the Field Club enjoyed a lovely evening visiting Mike and Sarah Kettlewell's farm, which is situated in rolling countryside just north of Chipping Norton. Dr Alan Larkman also joined us – he has been advising on conservation issues on this farm for many years but had never visited in the summer.



Phacelia in meadow - Jill Bailey

We were greeted by Mike and Sarah and the first thing we saw was a large poster of photographs of the wildflowers on the farm taken by Sarah between 23rd May and 3rd June this year, featuring over 70 species in bloom. We knew then that we were in for a special treat. Sarah's family has owned this farm for 400 years.

The farm is 400 acres with a pedigree herd of South Devon cattle, mixed arable crops and some woodland. The farm has been in Stewardship schemes for 15 years to increase biodiversity, all the arable fields have uncultivated margins and there are impressive native hedgerows that are trimmed only every 3 years – in one of them I counted 10 hedgerow species. There is a year-round feeding programme for vulnerable farmland birds that have declined so badly over the last 5 decades and to support this, 15 acres on the farm are sown for birdseed. There are hanging feeders of millet year-round to help Tree Sparrows and Reed Buntings. From late December to early May there is ground feeding to attract Chaffinches, Yellowhammers, Linnets, Skylarks and Corn Bunting plus the usual hedgerow birds.

Yellow Rattle is introduced to the feeding areas to keep down the grass and make the seeds more accessible to the birds. In places, double hedges with a ditch in the middle, cut back every three years, help provide shelter and nesting sites.



WOFC at Over Norton farm - Jill Bailey

The remains of medieval fishponds support reedbeds and birds such as little grebes, cormorants, kingfishers, a colony of reed buntings and some sedge warblers.

Mike and Sarah led us on an amble around the farm, including through a beautiful meadow where spotted orchids were in flower. In the last field the cattle were grazing including the impressive bull who was sitting contentedly surrounded by his ladies and their calves. Your scribe watched in amazement as Mike and Sarah went over to him, stroking him and talking to him as if he were a pet cat!

Our thanks to Mike and Sarah for their hospitality. In our coming winter programme is a visit to the farm in the winter, hopefully to see a good range of farmland birds.

Mary Elford

Crepuscular walk on Stonesfield Common 17 July 2019

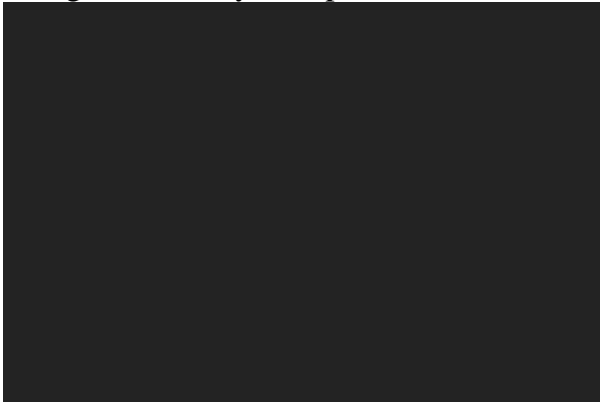
Crepuscular, a. Of twilight, active in twilight according to the OED. I don't know why we didn't simply call it a twilight walk but crepuscular sounded more intriguing and the aim was to look for creatures active around and after sunset, especially glow-worms. As the date approached we had growing misgivings about leading a group along some of the rough tracks over Stonesfield common in the dark, even though the blurb in the programme carried an 'elf 'n safety' warning. We had more misgivings when our recce two weeks previously failed to produce any glow-worms, or much else of interest. However, I'm pleased to say that in the end the eleven of us, including three visitors, who met at the western end of Stonesfield Common at eight thirty on a mild but overcast evening all returned safely and that we found a fair number of glow-worms.

It was daylight, although rather gloomy, when we set off. Because the female glow-worm

doesn't perform until the light level has dropped low enough, we wandered slowly over the common, looking at the limestone flora for which it is justly famous. The Meadow Clary was still in flower but we found no trace of the Pyramidal Orchids which we had found a few days earlier. Alison Weaver, who has the sharpest eyes of anyone I know, quickly spotted a couple of Roman Snails which are abundant at Stonesfield. Butterflies, including Marbled Whites and various brown species, were already roosting on grass stems and there were grasshoppers, more or less mature, everywhere. A little further on there were large patches of Marjoram and a lot of Field Scabious – it would be quite a sight on a sunny afternoon. Scabious is the food plant of *Nemophora metallica*, the Brassy Longhorn Moth, with gold/brassy wings and antennae which, at about an inch or more long, are several times the length of the body. It didn't take long to find some on the Scabious

flowers, in one case with three Six-spot Burnet Moths. White Plume Moths with their feathery wings perpendicular to the body were also abundant.

After descending through the woods to the Evenlode we walked slowly along the route of Akeman Street at Bagg's Bottom in the gloaming. That area is cropped (though how anything can grow on the stony ground there is beyond me) and there wasn't much of interest although we briefly registered – saw and heard - one or two bats, but not for long enough to identify the species.



Stones field common at night without glow worms - ADS

We reached the minor road between Combe and Stonesfield a bit after 10 pm, by which time it was dark enough for glow-worms to be seen and sure enough we found one in the long vegetation on the verge after only a few yards. In fact, a number of them were spread out quite evenly along the verges on both sides of the road. At this point we really did have severe worries – there was no footpath and the last S3 double-decker bus was coming – but after a hundred yards or so we reached the safety of a footpath and found more glowing females in garden hedges and one on

a wall at the base of a telegraph pole. By now the count was up to an unlucky thirteen.

Passing through the village and churchyard, and hoping not to disturb the residents too much, we investigated the burial ground, which revealed another three females and a mating pair on a grave (in joyous expectation of the lives to come?). It was the first time any of us had knowingly seen a male glow-worm and whilst there are some things that I wouldn't want to dance on my grave I think I would settle for glow-worms when the day comes.

We returned to the river via what Sue and I refer to as the Dinosaur Field, because a number of fossils of large prehistoric fauna have been found there, where we found another female. Regrettably there were no bats at the river, which has been a hotspot in the past, but we heard a female Tawny Owl, and possibly a young Tawny, quite nearby. We then climbed back up the steep path through the woods and along the top of the common where we saw one more glowing female and where our bat detectors (set at about 20 kiloHerz) revealed the churring of a number of grasshoppers, which could have been either Meadow or Common Green species.

We got back to our cars at 11:30 pm, all in one piece and fairly satisfied with the outcome of our crepuscular expedition – one male and nineteen female glow-worms. One or two people said what fun it had been to go for a walk in the dark, so perhaps the club should do this sort of thing more often!

John Cobb & Sue Morton

Bees at Stonesfield Common 4 August 2019

Ivan Wright, a local bee expert, led on an enjoyable prowling across Stonesfield Common, which is part of a SSSI, in search of bees and other insects. He had brought a large bee trap where we could watch them without risking them taking flight. We were shown how to wield a butterfly net effectively, though only a

few of us mastered the art. But it was fun trying. We found about 14 species of bees, a few wasps and hoverflies, and a strange fly, the Waisted Beegrabber, which is a scarce parasite of certain bees. Our thanks to Ivan for supplying the species list for the bees, wasps and flies.

Jill Bailey

Wigwell Local Wildlife Site, Charlbury 21 August 2019

Nine club members met at this small nature reserve on the western edge of Charlbury. The local town council hold a long lease of the site and have assigned this to the Wychwood Project, who are now responsible for its management. The walk was led by Neil Clennell, the chief executive of the Wychwood Project. Neil has lots of experience in looking after reptiles and he has held senior positions with BBOWT. He brought along to the walk two aesculapian snakes. These snakes are found on the European mainland and there are only two small colonies in Britain. We were able to hold and photograph these wonderful creatures.

Neil led members around the site and we saw the enclosures to protect the Meadow Clary,

which flowers in June. The site is limestone grassland and is presently managed so that trees and shrubs are removed by grazing or mowing. We saw a variety of wildflowers, including Meadow Cranesbill and lots of Red Bartsia. The present management plan expires soon and Neil is considering different options for the future, including some form of rewilding. Many conservationists now believe that ecological diversity can be improved not by carefully managing reserves for a narrow range of rare species but by creating "messy habitats" allowing scrub to develop naturally and generally letting natural processes thrive. It will be interesting to return to the site in 2 or 3 years to see how the site has changed.

Jonathan Noel

Bat Walk at Sherborne 11 September 2019

Eight people enjoyed a balmy evening's bat-hunting in this quiet Cotswold valley, led by the area ranger, Mike Robinson. To start with, Mike gave us a talk in the National Trust's office on the Sherborne Estate. The bats' mating season runs from August to October, and the females store the sperm until March or April, giving birth in June and July. In winter they roost underground in mines, old buildings, gaps in walls and roof spaces in a

state of torpor to conserve energy reserves. Each bat will eat some 3,000 insects a night, about 35% of their body weight. The Sherborne Brook runs through this small village towards the Windrush. The local woods, farmland and river provide fruitful hunting grounds for fourteen bat species, including some 300 Lesser Horseshoe Bats that roost in the former kennels of the Sherborne estate and at another site further

down the valley. The bats emerge to hunt at sunset, and have a number of other roost sites where they rest at intervals while hunting. They return to the roost later in the night, then make another sortie just before dawn.

Armed with bat detectors, we set out for the roost site just before sunset. It was fascinating to stand outside the roost and hear the rapid-fire echolocation clicks as the bats swooped in and out of the roost around us, often only narrowly avoiding us as they sampled the outside environment before going off to hunt further away. These bats have the highest frequency (108 kHz) of clicks of any British bat. They may travel more than 2km away from Sherborne while hunting. When most of the bats had left for the first hunt of the night we wandered down to the river, to where it widens into a large pool with a weir. On the

way we spotted a Noctule Bat, one of the larger British bats, flying in and out of the trees. This bat seemed to have a more gliding flight pattern than that of the Horseshoe Bats, and in low light might easily be mistaken for a bird. It also has a relatively low frequency clicks (20-25 kHz) that can be heard without a bat detector by many young people. We also picked up the higher frequency clicks of the Common Pipistrelle (45 kHz) and Soprano Pipistrelle (55 kHz). Down by the river we shone torches across the water to try to spot bats hunting insects close to the water surface. Unlike previous visits, we were not lucky this evening. In the past this has been a good spot to see Daubenton's bats, but even the stronger torches did not pick up as many insects as usual, so perhaps that was why we didn't see any bats here.

Jill Bailey



OBITUARY

YVONNE TOWNSEND

13 December 1937 – 15 June 2019



Together with her husband, Roger, Yvonne was a keen member of the Field Club for over 50 years. She is remembered for her warm, generous personality, her smart fashion sense and her excellent culinary skills. A keen naturalist and conservationist, she was involved in many organisations, including the RSPB, OOS and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. She was on the

Committee for many years and was made President in the early part of this year.

Yvonne organised many of the Club's holidays, and is especially remembered for managing to organise self-catering cottages for all the members who went to the small island of Bardsey, and for her detailed research for our very successful holiday on the island of Arran.

Many of us remember with fondness "the full Hailey" – the enormous breakfasts she used to put on at her home in Hailey after each dawn chorus walk. By mid-afternoon many of us were still to be found draped around the living room in sated torpor. On evenings when the Committee met at Hailey, we were treated to an excellent supper afterwards. Even when not catering herself, she organised our Christmas dinners and summer parties.

A devout Christian with a big heart, Yvonne was a devoted mother, and with her passing it feels as if the Field Club has lost its matriarch. But she lives on in many good memories.

Jill Bailey