



West Oxfordshire Field Club

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AUTUMN

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EDITORIAL

Looking out of my study window on a rare sunny morning, there is little sign that autumn is here, except for the tinge of frost on the fence, and the thinning of foliage on the walnut tree. Grass and weeds are growing as fast as ever – with the wettest summer for 100 years, vegetation everywhere has run rampant, with some trees and shrubs putting on several feet of growth, weeds flourishing as never before. The green has been the intense, vivid green of the Emerald Isle rather than of England, reminding me of a wonderful sunny week spent with the Field Club on the Burren many years ago. But with the low temperatures, it has been greenery rather than flowers in the garden. The runner beans took until September to flower, and produced only a handful of beans. The apple harvest is very poor this year because of the shortage of pollinating bees in spring – this summer, rather than collecting honey for their beehives, beekeepers have had to feed syrup to their bees to keep them alive. The warm spring, cold summer and then a brief warm spell again seem to have fooled some of the wild flowers into thinking they have seen winter and are now on another summer. I have buttercups and primroses flowering in the garden, and on our field trip to Bradwell Airfield in August there was a cowslip in flower.

Despite the country-wide shortage of bees which tend not to fly in the rain, my small garden has been host to a wide variety of bees from solitary bees that live in little holes in the lawn, to tiny bees in clusters under leaves, leaf-cutter bees that nibble crescent-shaped 'holes' in the leaves of trees and shrubs, and a wide range of bumblebees. Early flowers are important for bumblebees. The large dozy queens that blunder awkwardly around the garden in early spring, and sun themselves on the front doorstep have to found a new colony each year by themselves, making the wax cells and rearing the young until they have bred enough workers to carry on the task. Foxgloves are a great mainstay of bumble bees, their buzzing continuing until some time after sunset on warm evenings. A lavender hedge bridges the gap between spring and summer flowers, and often provides a late summer feast as well.

My buddleia is still flowering profusely now – the special patio varieties seem to flower well into October, and last year into November. An extra prune in late February delays flowering by about a month, so it coincides better with the emergence of the summer brood of butterflies, and the migration of painted ladies. Sadly this year there are few insects to feed on the buddleia. A recent walk along the butterfly trail in Bernwood Forest on a hazy but sunny morning netted only two butterflies (a silver-washed fritillary and a speckled wood) in 2 hours. But when it was still only 6°C this morning, a lone red admiral was sunning itself on the fence. What is stranger than the lack of insects is the lack of birds. The swallows, martins and swifts came late and left early. In the garden there is utter silence. Not even a goldfinch to be heard; no blackbirds or thrush. And while usually there are at least two pairs of robins around, now there is just a lone youngster, not yet in voice. The starlings and greenfinches vanished 3 years ago; there's been not a chaffinch all summer. Even the tits and owls in the local nest boxes have mostly fared badly. The owls in particular dislike hunting in wet long grass, as their feathers are not waterproof. Small mammals are also affected by the wet weather, at risk of flooded burrows and waterlogged pastures.

Watching the squirrels run along the fence with mouths full of walnuts reminds me of a story I heard from a colleague who went to the Olympic beach volleyball at Horseguards. Apparently

they had to spend ages raking the sand every morning, because the local squirrels buried nuts in it every evening.

Raindrops themselves have a special beauty, and the effect varies widely according to the type of surface they land on. At this time of year the myriad tiny spider webs cling to droplets that dangle like jewels enhancing the intricate pattern of threads. Hostas collect large lazy water drops that glide slowly down the leaf to merge into an even bigger drop, while gleaming pools grow at the bases of the sword-like leaves of irises. Grass blades collect lines of small sparkling droplets, and have you noticed how wet rose leaves give off a brilliant but harsh white reflection? But for me the really special rain drops are the ones that decorate a perfect rose newly expanded with pristine velvety petals.

The Club were lucky in their holiday to the Lizard peninsula in Cornwall, getting a fine run of sunny May days with high temperatures. With the expert help of our leader Peter Creed, we found over 150 species of plants, including a number of rarities. The limestone grassland of Aston Upthorpe Downs and the meadows and fields around Broadwell airfield and the remains of the old runway were also excellent plant-hunting spots. The Club carried out some moth-trapping at Asthall Leigh, looked at environmental farm management at Greystone Farm near Bourton-on-the-Water, and made various other trips to enjoy wildlife in general, including a joint trip with the RSPB to Greenham Common for nightjars. We are now looking forward to damp woodland fungus forays and our indoor meetings and winter walks, and our October birding holiday in Norfolk.

Jill Bailey

Your Newsletter

Despite running to 16 pages I have not been able to include everything which has been sent to me. I am sorry if your contribution is one of those held over for the next newsletter.

Once again Jill has written an interesting editorial which gets it off to a good start. I am grateful to Jill and all of who have contributed – without you there would be no newsletter.

Don't forget this is a club newsletter intended to be used by members for sharing their observations, making comments, etc. on anything associated with wildlife and the countryside, as well as for reports of walks and trips that made by the Field Club or with any other like-minded group. By the way, a copy of this Newsletter is passed on to the Thames Valley Record Centre, which is always on the look-out for new records of natural history and geological interest. With this in mind, if you include in your contribution to this Newsletter a sighting of an animal or plant which is particularly interesting, could you please state exactly where you saw it, preferably with a map reference.

The deadline for the next newsletter is the end of March 2013 but I'm happy to receive your contributions any time. Please send your contributions to me by e-mail as an attachment (Word is preferred) or on paper by post to the address given on the programme.

Brenda Betteridge (Newsletter Editor)

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Your Committee

Tony Mattingley has decided to step down from the committee. He was one of the very early members of the Field Club but he had to give it up due to the demands of work. On his retirement 11 years ago he rejoined and it was not long before he was on the committee. During his time as Walks Programme Secretary he provided us with interesting programmes of walks. Also at times his acumen with finances was much appreciated. His presence will be missed and we thank him for the contribution he has made to the Field Club. We are very pleased to welcome Diana Johnson onto the Committee to fill the vacancy left following Tony's departure.

Sue Morton

Plant Sale

Our annual plant sale raised £93.30 which is more than twice the amount raised last year. Reporting on the outcome of the 2011 plant sale in last year's newsletter I noted that the £42 raised was £1.70 higher than it was in 2010 and exhorted members to try to maintain this trend never imagining that this would be the outcome! This is a welcome boost to the Field Club's finances. A big thank you to all of you who so generously supported the sale.

Brenda Betteridge

REPORTS OF FIELD MEETINGS

Cropredy and the Oxford Canal 15 April 2012

The Field Club's first walk in the far north of the county (in my memory of the Club) was very

popular with 20 people turning up on a lovely walking day, sunny with a cool northerly breeze. The 3½ mile walk started off leaving Cropredy and heading south along the Oxford Canal towpath to Bridge No. 156. Here the path crossed over the bridge and headed through Peewit Farm and up the gentle gradient of Mill Lane, over the busy railway line to a side road which wended its way around Great Bourton village and joined up with another footpath. This took us across fields, passing under the railway line this time and back into Cropredy.

This was a gentle walk with good views of the countryside just waking up after the winter, the May blossom about to open from bud and replace the Blackthorn blossom which has been a good show – let's hope the sloes are equally as good in the autumn.

A Wren was singing heartily en route and a Green Woodpecker was calling strongly across the fields. It was very cheering to finish the walk with a fine view of six Swallows hawking for insects around the legs of cattle grazing in a field. This was everyone's first view of Swallows this spring.

David Roberts

Homefield Wood 12 May 2012

Following a field trip to Homefield Wood in July 2 years ago, this visit was earlier in the year to see principally the Military and Fly Orchids. Seven members visited the wood on the first sunny day for a long time. Walking from the parking area along the main ride we soon saw several Orange Tip butterflies close to Jack-by-the-hedge, one of the food plants of their caterpillars. Turning right up the hill, just outside the nature reserve, we found two fine flowering specimens of Early Purple Orchid. These had been protected by a wire cage from the several species of deer found in the area.

The reserve is famous for its Military Orchids, but unfortunately only one of the 100+ specimens had started to flower. However, we did see over 20 flowering Fly Orchids. Also in the 'orchid glade' we found a Grizzled Skipper butterfly nectaring on the food plant of its caterpillar, namely Barren Strawberry.

Moving on to the meadow area, we saw a Comma butterfly, while two Red Kites were seen gliding overhead. A rather noisy Jay was also spotted and a Blackcap was heard. In the right-hand corner of the meadow, we found about 20 specimens of the UK's tallest orchid, Broad-leaved Helleborine, which does not flower until mid-July. Also evident here, amongst hundreds of primroses and cowslips (which had flowered earlier) were about 20 fine specimens of False Oxlip, which is a hybrid between the cowslip and the primrose, i.e. *Primula veris* ? *vulgaris* (P. ? polyantha). The flowers were unfortunately well past their best.

Malcolm Brownsword

Plants noted:

Jack-by-the-hedge *Alliaria petiolata*
Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*
Wavy Bittercress *Cardamine flexuosa*
Common Forget-me-not *Myosotis arvensis*
Wood Spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*
Bugle *Ajuga reptans*
Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*
Primrose *Primula vulgaris*
Yellow Archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*
Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*
Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*
Daisy *Bellis perennis*
Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*
Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*
Green Hellebore *Heleborus viridis*
Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*
Common Dog Violet *Viola riviniana*
Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*
Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*
Bush Vetch *Vicia sepium*
Woodruff *Galium odoratum*
Lady's Smock *Cardamine palustris*
Thyme-leaved Speedwell *Veronica sepyllifolia*
Annual Meadow Grass *Poa annua*
Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana*
Ground Ivy *Glechoma hederacea*

Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*
Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*
Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*
Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*
Male Fern *Dropteris filix-mas*
Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*
Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* Cowslip *Primula veris*
Ivy-leaved Speedwell *Veronica hederifolia*
Military Orchid *Orchis militaris*
Fly Orchid *Ophrys insectifera*
Wood Sedge *Carex sylvatica*
Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*
Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*
Twayblade *Listera ovata*
False Oxlip *Primula ? polyantha*
Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*
Upright Brome *Bromus erectus*
Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*

Brenda Betteridge

Dawn Chorus – Minster Lovell and Crawley 13 May 2012

Nine of us met in the Ruins car park just before 4.00 a.m. on a clear and frosty morning with the stars still glimmering in the sky. Within the first 17 minutes, Tawny Owl, Robin, Pheasant, Red-legged Partridge and Lapwing had been heard. As we made our way down the path towards the church, pausing occasionally to listen, the first Song Thrushes were heard singing, soon followed by Rook, Jackdaw, Blackbird and Wren. While we were listening to a Goldcrest in the conifer grove just beyond the river foot-bridge, someone spotted a Barn Owl quartering the meadow we'd just walked through, most probably the one that we'd watched in the same location during last year's dawn chorus walk. A little later, on the way through the meadows towards Maggots Grove, we heard Blackcap, Chaffinch and Chiffchaff singing, and from the path up through the wood, a Treecreeper. Soon after we'd emerged from the trees, a Common Whitethroat went through its parachuting display flight routine several times above a hedge close to the path, and then perched on a twig in the sunlight just in front of us. On our way towards Crawley we saw a Roe Deer in Roger Townsend's wild-flower meadow, just where we'd watched one with its fawn last year. In the reeds nearby, a Sedge Warbler sang briefly, and through the village Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Starlings and House Sparrows sang and called. Along the path between Crawley and Minster Lovell a pair of Yellowhammers were heard and then spotted in their usual patch. Several people towards the rear of the group also noted a Garden Warbler. Back at the car park, a Kestrel at 06.40 a.m. rounded off the species list.

Thanks to all those who came along and contributed to the count, which totalled 40 species, just one less than last year's total.

Bird list with the time of each first species recorded:

03.55 Tawny Owl
03.55 Robin
04.00 Pheasant
04.05 Red-legged Partridge
04.08 Lapwing
04.15 Song Thrush
04.17 Rook
04.17 Jackdaw
04.18 Blackbird
04.19 Wren
04.34 Woodpigeon
04.34 Barn Owl
04.35 Mallard
04.40 Goldcrest
04.46 Moorhen
04.46 Mute Swan
04.48 Blackcap
04.55 Chaffinch
04.56 Great Tit

05.05 Carrion Crow
05.08 Chiffchaff
05.12 Treecreeper
05.15 Whitethroat
05.15 Dunnock
05.18 Skylark
05.21 Cuckoo
05.30 Blue Tit
05.31 Sedge Warbler
05.32 Green Woodpecker
05.39 Magpie
05.40 Greenfinch
05.40 Swallow
05.45 Buzzard
05.46 Goldfinch
05.47 Starling
05.53 House Sparrow
06.10 Yellowhammer
06.10 Garden Warbler
06.35 Collared Dove
06.40 Kestrel

David Rolfe

Lizard Peninsula, Cornwall 24–28 May 2012

Ten (or was it twelve?) of us joined our leader, Peter Creed, and his wife Barbara for a long weekend on the Lizard Peninsula, well known for its unusual geology, rugged coastline and fascinating flora. The Club has been lucky with the weather on its last few trips, and we were lucky again this time with mostly sunny, but also very windy, weather most of the time. Indeed the wind was so strong at some points that we had to retreat from the cliff edges for fear of being blown over.

After a long journey down from Oxfordshire to the Helston area, we met up at a local pub for dinner. A short walk down the lane gave a taste of things to come, with enchantingly pretty hedge banks full of Alexanders, Three-cornered Leek, Red Campion, Wall Pennywort and Bluebells.

The following morning we set off from the car park above Mullion Cove and walked down the lane to the Cove itself, admiring the pink oxalis and wild gladioli growing in the hedge banks on the way. Once down at the Cove, we stopped to admire the picture-postcard harbour (and to note the existence of a teasshop for later on) before heading steeply up onto the cliffs. The short cropped turf was a patchwork of yellow Kidney Vetch, white Sea Campion and pink Thrift, with Spring Squills, Sheepsbit, Wild Chives and Bluebells. Peter pointed out patches of bright yellow on some inaccessible rocks, which were the rare Hairy Greenweed, a speciality of the area. Ken found us a sheltered spot for lunch, where we saw a Wheatear. Just as we stood up to leave, I spotted a movement in the grass near my feet. It was a strange sight, seemingly a small snake with no head. Later on I discovered that it was probably a Slow Worm's tail, which had been detached from the main body in an attack by some animal, maybe a bird. Apparently the detached tail will carry on wriggling for quite some time afterwards to distract the predator, and the Slow Worm then grows a new tail. I just hope that we weren't the unwitting cause of the Slow Worm jettisoning its tail.

Our circular route took us back to the Cove, where most of the group disappeared into the tea shop for assorted Cornish delicacies such as cream teas and ice creams.

The next day was sunny, but cooler and even windier. We headed for the Kynance Cove area to look for more rarities. Before we had even reached the car park, Peter's attention was caught by a large patch of Rosy Garlic by the roadside, so we stopped to admire and photograph it. We soon found many Green-winged Orchids, and then the hunt was on for the rare Land Quillwort and some of the many rare clovers for which the area is famous. The 19th century botanist Rev. Johns performed his 'hat trick' nearby, covering at least 10 species of clover and associated plants with his straw hat. The wind that day wouldn't have permitted a repeat of that trick, but we did see Upright Clover, Long-headed Clover and Western Clover. Further along was Thyme Broomrape, a dramatic rusty red plant which as its name suggests is parasitic on Wild Thyme. Then Peter spotted Land Quillwort in a patch of bare earth and photographed it for the record. Considering that this plant looks rather like a seedling of Thrift with leaves 3–8 cm long it is amazing that Peter was able to spot it. Land Quillwort (*Isoetes hystrix*) is a pteridophyte, which

occurs mainly in temporarily wet habitats called vernal pools. It is native to the Mediterranean region, north-western Africa, and the coasts of western Europe north-west to Cornwall. Apart from some sites on the Lizard peninsula in Cornwall the only other places where this plant can be found in the British Isles are on the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Alderney.

We stopped for lunch on the side of a rocky gully and were delighted to see a pair of Choughs poking around in the turf on the opposite side. Choughs re-established themselves on the Lizard in 2002 and have bred every year since then. For a not-very-good birdwatcher they are a real treat – a rarity that doesn't skulk in the bushes and, with its striking glossy black plumage, red legs and downward-curved red beak, is impossible to mistake for anything else. After lunch, and the discovery of yet more rare clovers, we retraced our steps to the car park and carried on down to Kynance Cove, passing some huge alliums at least 5 feet tall on the way. Peter thought they might be Wild Leek (*Allium ampeloprasum*), but couldn't positively identify them as they were still in bud. We also spotted Rock Samphire on our way to another ice cream opportunity, then hurried back to the cars to avoid being caught in a storm that we could see approaching in the distance.

Mary Elford had bought her moth trap with her, and set it up for two nights. Despite a lack of communication which meant it wasn't turned on the first night, and a thunderstorm the second night, she trapped a small but interesting collection of moths, some of which came out to the pub with us that night.

Our third day was a change from the windy cliff tops. As the weather seemed a little more unsettled, Peter decided that we should explore the sheltered woodlands along the Helford River, which produced some different flowers such as the very attractive Pencilled Geranium. Being such a mild and moist spot, it also produced a good haul of beautiful mosses and liverworts. We ate our lunch in a sheltered cove and poked around in some rock pools, with top shells and beadlet anemones. There were also flower-like tube worms that retreated into their tubes at the slightest disturbance.

We had warned the café in the car park that we would be back for our cream tea at about 4.30 pm, and were able to tuck into scones straight out of the oven. A tasty end to a very successful trip. Many thanks to Peter for his leadership and expertise, and to Yvonne for the organisation. Sue Morton

List of plants (omitting common species) from about 200 noted (* rare)

Mullion Cove:

Pink Purslane *Claytonia sibirica*
Three-cornered Leek (Garlic) *Allium triquetrum*
Alexanders *Smyrniolum olusatrum*
Sea Campion *Silene uniflora*
Hemlock Water Dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*
Navelwort *Umbilicus rupestris*
Pellitory of the Wall *Parietaria judaica*
Common Scurvy-grass *Cochlearia officinalis*
White Ramping-fumatory *Fumaria capreolata*
Eastern Gladiolus *Gladiolus communis*
Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*
Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*
Thrift *Armeria maritima*
Sea Fern-grass (Stiff Sand-grass) *Catapodium marinum*
Curly Crisp-moss *Trichostomum crispulum*
Spring Squill *Scilla verna*
Stag's-horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus*
Spring Sandwort *Minuartia verna**
Sea Ivory *Ramalina siliquosa* (lichen)
Hairy Greenweed *Genista pilosa*
Sea Carrot *Daucus carota* subsp. *gummifer*
Sheepsbit *Jasione montana*
Silver Hair-grass *Aira caryophyllaea*
Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*
Green-winged Orchid *Orchis morio*
Chives *Allium schoenoprasum*
Marsh Arrow-grass *Triglochin palustris*
Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*
Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus fammula*
Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*

Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* .
 Little Mouse-ear *Cerastium semidecandrum*
 Least Soft Brome *Bromus hordeaceus* ssp. *ferronii*
 Rough Clover *Trifolium scabrum*
 English Stonecrop *Sedum anglicum*
 Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii*
 Fringed Rupturewort *Herniaria ciliolata**
 Camomile *Chamaemelum nobile*
 Sticky Groundsel *Senecio viscosus*
 Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*
 Yellow Flag (Iris) *Iris pseudacorus*
 Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*
 Narrow Buckler Fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*
 Rest Harrow *Ononis repens*
 Knotted Clover (Soft Trefoil) *Trifolium striatum*
 Heath Dog Violet *Viola canina*
 Pale Dog Violet *Viola lactea* *
 Marsh Cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum*
 Toad Rush *Juncus bufonius*
 Petty Whin (Needle Furze) *Genista anglica*
 Heath Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*
 Cornish Heath *Erica vagans* *
 Black Rush *Juncus atratus*

Kynance Cove:

Rosy Garlic *Allium roseum*
 Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*
 Red (Thyme) Broomrape *Orobancha alba**
 Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*
 Burnet Rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*
 Sea Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus*
 Land Quill-wort *Isoetes histrix**
 Sea Mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum*
 Long-headed Clover *Trifolium incarnatum* ssp. *molinerii**
 Sea Mouse-ear *Cerastium diffusum*
 Western Clover* *Trifolium occidentale*
 Sea Milkwort *Glaux maritima*
 Slender Club Rush *Isolepis sernua*
 Upright Clover *Trifolium strictum**
 Bloody Crane's-bill *Geranium sanguineum*
 Honey Garlic *Nectaroscordum siculum*
 Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum*
 Tree Mallow *Lavatera arborea*
 Frosted Orache *Atriplex laciniata*
 Butcher's Broom *Ruscus aculeatus*
 Wild Madder *Rubia peregrina*
 Sea Storksbill *Erodium maritimum*

Helford coast path:

Greater Featherwort *Plagiochila asplenoides* (liverwort)
 Common Pocket-moss *Fissidens taxifolius*
 Hart's-tongue Thyme-moss *Plagiomnium undulatum*
 Great Scented Liverwort *Conocephalum conicum*
 Fox-tail Feather-moss *Thamnobryum alopecurum*
 Mind-your-own-business *Soleirolia soleirolii*
 Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana*
 Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysoplenium oppositifolium*
 Pencilled Cranesbill *Geranium versicolor*
 Bifid Crestwort *Lophocolia bidentata*
 Scaly Male Fern *Dryopteris affinis*
 Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant*
 Frizzled PinCushion *Ulota phyllantha* (moss)*
 Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*
 Minute Pouncewort *Cololejeunea minutissima* (liverwort)*

Even Scalewort *Radula complanata* (liverwort)
Dwarf Neckera *Neckera pumilla*
Small-flowered Buttercup *Ranunculus parviflorus*

Jill Bailey and Ken and Brenda Betteridge

Greenham Common 10 June 2012

The weather forecast for this joint evening car trip with the Oxford RSPB Local Group was for light rain turning to heavy showers, followed by prolonged heavy rain, so it was no surprise that only eight of us turned up. As we assembled in the car park, Song Thrushes were singing in the surrounding trees, a Blackcap was persistently giving its alarm call in a small isolated hawthorn tree surrounded by a clump of nettles, a Goldcrest sang in a conifer tree across the road and a Sparrowhawk flew over. Along the footpath through the trees towards the more open areas of this former airfield's taxiways and runway, no longer evident and now predominantly gorse scrubland, Blackcaps, Common Whitethroats, Chaffinches and a Meadow Pipit were seen and several species such as Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, and a single Yellowhammer were heard. We then made our way to a largely tree and scrub-free area on the far side of the site where several small flocks of Linnets and a few Lapwings were the only birds seen as dusk approached. It had become quite dark by the time we'd moved on to a recently clear-felled area with a few birch trees and a dense field layer where we soon saw a roding Woodcock and, after some churring song, a Nightjar which on several occasions flew over to where we were standing. On our way back to the cars we heard several more but it was too dark by then to see any of them, so much so that we had some difficulty in finding the path back to the cars! We were, however, fortunate that it remained dry throughout the evening

Birds species seen and/or heard:

Sparrowhawk
Buzzard
Kestrel
Lapwing
Woodcock
Common Tern
Wood Pigeon
Nightjar
Meadow Pipit
Wren
Dunnock
Robin
Blackbird
Song Thrush
Common Whitethroat
Blackcap
Chiffchaff
Willow Warbler
Goldcrest
Magpie
Jackdaw
Carrion Crow
Starling
Chaffinch
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Linnet
Yellowhammer

David Rolfe

Greystones Farm, Bourton-on-the-Water 7 July 2012

We were lucky once again with a reasonably fine evening and there was a good turnout for a repeat of the walk we did a few years before. In fact it was in July 2007 and that was the month when we had the floods but we were fortunate that we managed to walk the full circuit which took us down through the wild flower meadows of Brooks Moors and Late Roses Moors, part of Salmonsbury Meadows, an SSSI.

It took centuries for the Moors to develop the fine meadow grasses and wild flowers which depend on the traditional hay-making routine of cutting the grass in July after plants have

flowered and animals and birds have raised their young. In the past, much of southern England was covered in these flowery meadows. By the mid-20th century traditional farming became less profitable and farmers were encouraged to use newer technologies. Chemical fertilisers were used. Silage replaced hay and meadows were ploughed to grow more profitable crops. The result was the devastating loss of 97% of English hay meadows, together with their wildflowers and butterflies.

A good number of the old meadows have survived at Greystones Farm and, despite our unseasonable wet summer this year we were able to get a taste of what things used to be like, although because of high water levels and deep mud we were unable to do the full circuit of the river meadows (the rivers – Eye and Dikler) which is really required to do this walk full justice. We did walk down the Oxfordshire Way to the River Eye to see the good groups of orchids on ‘Wick Moor’ but then we had to retrace our steps and miss out on Hypesleys Moors, Late Matthew’s Moors and Boswell’s Moors and there was no access to Brooks Moors and Late Rose’s Moors.

As well as being old preserved farmland this site goes back nearly 6,000 years to Neolithic and Bronze Age periods and has a late Iron Age Hill Fort together with Roman remains. All in all a very special area and on a true dry summer evening has much to offer in plants and wildlife.
David Roberts

Flowers noted:

White Clover *Trifolium repens*
Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*
Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*
Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*
Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare*
Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*
Cock’s-foot *Dactylis glomerata*
Pineapple-weed *Matricaria discoides*
Wetted Thistle *Carduus crispus*
White Campion *Silene latifolia*
Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*
Dove’s-foot Crane’s-bill *Geranium molle*
Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*
Smooth Hawk’s-beard *Crepis capillaris*
Jack-by-the-hedge *Alliaria petiolata*
Meadow Crane’s-bill *Geranium pratense*
Herb Bennet *Geum urbanum*
Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*
Hedge Mustard *Sisymbrium officinale*
Campion hybrid *Silene dioica* ? *Silene latifolia*
Woody Nightshade *Solanum dulcamara*
Comfrey *Symphytum* sp.
Burdock *Arctium* sp.
Hedge Woundwort *Stachys sylvatica*
Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*
Perennial Ryegrass *Lolium perenne*
Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*
False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*
Greater Plantain *Plantago major*
Dock *Rumex* sp.
Sheep’s Fescue *Festuca ovina*
Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*
Yellow Rattle *Rhynanthus minor*
Common Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*
Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia caespitosa*
Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus*
Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*
Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*
Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*
Common Yellow Sedge *Carex demissa*
Self-heal *Prunella vulgaris*
Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*

Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*
 Watercress *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*
 Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*
 Wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana*
 Quaking Grass *Briza media*
 Crested Dogs-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*
 Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*
 Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*
 Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*
 Timothy *Phleum pratense*
 Cut-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium dissectum*
 Soft Brome *Bromus mollis*
 Small-leaved Timothy *Phleum bartoloni*
 Common Mallow *Malva sylvestris*
 Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus*
 Sowthistle *Sonchus* sp.
 Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica*
 Early Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata*
 Thyme-leaved Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia*
 Barren Brome *Bromus sterilis*
 Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*
 Rough Meadow-grass *Poa trivialis*
 Brenda Betteridge

Asthall walk 24 July 2012

After all the rain we really appreciated having a beautiful warm sunny evening for our walk in the Windrush Valley. What a joy to be able to set out without waterproofs and umbrellas wearing only light clothes. As on previous occasions (18 May 2006 and 20 August 2009) we set off down the footpath at the edge of a wheat field towards Kitesbridge. Ahead of us was a lovely view over Asthall and beyond up the Windrush valley. The next field is a meadow in which lots of sheep were grazing. It is not floristically rich but the footpath passes a short south-facing bank where several interesting flowering plants can be found, the most notable of which is Wild Clary. It had gone to seed but the flowering spikes were still standing.

At Kitesbridge where Akeman Street crossed the River Windrush the water extended out further than usual as a result of the recent heavy rains. In the area which had been a timber yard there were some magnificent spires of mulleins standing tall above the stinging nettles. It was very quiet by the river with very little bird activity. Further along three adult Mute Swans were minding their own business at the edge of the river.

We left the water meadows at Asthall Bridge and turned left onto the road. We stopped to examine the carving of the rifle made by a prisoner of war in the First World War. We also noted Wall Rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), a small fern, with fan-shaped leaflets growing on the stonework of the bridge. Before entering the village we took the track which leads to Asthall Farm and Tocque House. The track extends beyond the farm alongside fields of wheat. It was here on the last visit we found lots of bulaces – too early this year! A few arable plants, e.g. Heartsease and Field Madder, had survived the herbicide sprays and were to be found at the edge of the track next to the wheat.

This track brought us back to Worsham. The last field had recently been cut for hay. We were reminded that this has been a particularly wet summer when we encountered the only wet area on the walk – a spring was bubbling up and running down to join the stream which runs into the Windrush.

We stopped at Worsham Bridge to view the swollen river before climbing up out of the valley, leaving the few houses and factory behind. Even though the verges had been cut recently there were still lots of flowers to be seen. One of these, Wild Liquorice (*Astragalus glycyphyllos*), a local species of rough grassland on dry limestone soils, has found a way of avoiding the mower by growing next to the hedge and scrambling up into it.

The only moth in evidence which Mary could identify was a plume moth.

The evening ended with an enjoyable chat over tea/wine and cake in our garden until it got dark. What a treat to be able to sit outside in the evening!

Flowers noted:

Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*
 Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*
 Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*
 Common Poppy *Papaver rhoeas*

White Campion *Silene latifolia*
 Cut-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium dissectum*
 Pineapple-weed *Matricaria discoides*
 Hedge Bedstraw *Galium mollugo*
 Red Bartsia *Odonites vernus*
 Common Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*
 Hairy St John's-wort *Hypericum hirsutum*
 Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*
 Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*
 Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*
 Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*
 Nipplewort *Lapsana communis*
 Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*
 Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*
 Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare*
 Musk Thistle *Carduus nutans*
 Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*
 Black Horehound *Ballota nigra*
 White Clover *Trifolium repens*
 Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*
 Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*
 Smooth Hawksbeard *Crepis capillaris*
 Wild Clary *Salvia verbenaca*
 Woolly Thistle *Cirsium eriophorum*
 Common Mallow *Malva sylvestris*
 Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*
 Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*
 Greater Burdock *Arctium lappa*
 Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus*
 Dandelion *Taraxacum* sp.
 Meadow Crane's-bill *Geranium pratense*
 White Dead-nettle *Lamium album*
 Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis*
 Mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris*
 Field Forget-me-not *Myosotis arvensis*
 Self-heal *Prunella vulgaris*
 Hedge Woundwort *Stachys sylvatica*
 White Bryony *Bryonia dioica*
 Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*
 Rough Chervil *Chaerophyllum temulum*
 Field Madder *Sheradia arvensis*
 Thyme-leaved Speedwell *Veronica serpyllifolia*
 Dove's-foot Crane's-bill *Geranium molle*
 Common Orache *Atriplex patula*
 Parsley Piert *Aphanes arvensis*
 Knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare*
 Cleavers *Galium aparine*
 Common Poppy *Papaver rhoeas*
 Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*
 Common Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*
 Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*
 Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*
 Common Vetch *Vicia sativa*
 Shepherd's Purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*
 Watercress *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*
 Hybrid Campion *Silene dioica* ? *Silene latifolia*
 Herb Bennet *Geum urbanum*
 Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*
 Welled Thistle *Carduus crispus*
 Hemlock *Conium maculatum*
 Scentless Mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum*
 Bladder Campion *Silene vulgaris*
 Common Knapweed *Cenaurea nigra*
 Wild Liquorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos*

Perforate St John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum*

Birds noted:
Grey Heron
Canada Goose
Wood Pigeon
Carrion Crow
Skylark
Long-tailed Tit
House Martin
Swallow
Mute Swan
Goldfinch
Buzzard
Moorhen
Magpie
Mallard
Linnet
House Sparrow
Yellowhammer

Brenda Betteridge

Broadwell Airfield 7 August 2012

Thirteen brave souls ignored the steady rain to prowl around this disused WWII airfield, at its peak busier than present-day Brize Norton. From here gliders and troops were taken to France, men rescued from Dunkirk and other battlefields, and cargo transported to the Middle and Far East until 1947.

The first treat was right in the lay-by where we parked our cars – a sturdy Hound's-tongue plant bearing the characteristic clusters of four nutlets, which look like little hedgehogs. The footpath leads through a meadow that is a treasure trove of wildflowers. The Pyramidal Orchids, which often blaze across this meadow in early spring, were almost over, but there was a wide variety of plants typical of calcareous soils, including a few delicate plants of Hairy Tare. Despite the very wet long grass, people fanned out over the meadow and soon backs were bowed as noses swept close to the ground, searching for gems between the grasses. Little groups were dotted across the meadow, often hunched under a large umbrella, centred around a knowledgeable member, or a good field guide.

In the adjacent field, which had been ploughed fairly recently, we found both Round-leaved Fluellen and Sharp-leaved Fluellen within a few centimetres of each other – a good chance to compare them.

The airstrip itself offered a surprising number of species, many of them unusually dwarfed forms in the sparse soil, just holding on in the cracks of the tarmac. There were swards of Stonecrop, both Biting and English, while the strip was flanked by grassland rich in Teasels, Scabious and Knapweed, with occasional splashes of yellow Hawk's-beard. Near the road, where the soil was banked up, we found Weld and Mignonette growing close together (another opportunity to compare two closely related species), Tansy, Great Mullein, a giant Hemlock and Black Horehound.

While a recce on a sunny morning 10 days earlier had yielded a range of butterflies, very few had ventured out in the rain, and there was scarcely a bird to be seen. This is a great site for browsing – within a few metres of the road you can find a wide range of wild flowers and insects, all on level ground. After almost 2 hours, when the rain had finally begun to trickle into uncomfortable places and the light was dimming under the heavy cloud cover, we retreated with a satisfactory haul of species.

Jill Bailey

Plant list

Roadside:
Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale*

Meadow:
Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*
Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*
Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*

Common Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*
Wetted Thistle *Carduus crispus*
Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare*
Common Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*
Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*
White Clover *Trifolium repens*
Wild Parsnip *Pastinaca sativa*
Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*
Tansy *Tanacetum vulgare*
Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*
Rough Chervil *Chaerophyllum temulum*
Self-heal *Prunella vulgaris*
Ribbed Melilot *Melilotus officinalis*
Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*
Perforate St John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum*
Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*
Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*
Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*
Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*
Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*
Common Restharrow *Ononis repens*
Red Bartsia *Odonites vernus*
Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus* agg.
Common Vetch *Vicia sativa*
Cowslip *Primula veris*
Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*
Wild Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*
Tor Grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*
Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea*
Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*
Smooth Hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris*
Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca*
Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*
Goat's-beard *Tragopogon pratensis*

Arable field:

Round-leaved Fluellen *Kicksia spuria*
Common Field Speedwell *Veronica persica*
Groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*
Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*
Field Forget-me-not *Myosotis arvensis*
Hoary Willowherb *Epilobium parviflorum*
Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia exigua*
Cut-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium dissectum*
Sharp-leaved Fluellen *Kicksia elatine*
Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*
Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis*
White Dead-nettle *Lamium album*
Charlock *Sinapis arvensis*
Cleavers *Galium aparine*
Boundary to old runway:
Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica*
Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*
Smooth Tare *Vicia tetraspermum*
Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*
Woody Nightshade *Solanum dulcamara*
White Bryony *Bryonia dioica*
White Campion *Silene latifolia*
Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*
Black Horehound *Ballota nigra*
Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*
Weld *Reseda luteola*
Wild Mignonette *Reseda lutea*
Winter-cress *Barbarea vulgaris*

Hemlock Conium maculatum
 Great Mullein Verbascum thapsus
 Common Poppy Papaver rhoeas
 Common Orache Atriplex patula
 Hedge Bedstraw Galium mollugo
 Lady's Bedstraw Galium verum
 Nipplewort Lapsana communis
 Old runway:
 White Stonecrop Sedum album
 Creeping Cinquefoil Potentilla reptans
 Dove's-foot Crane's-bill Geranium molle
 Red Dead-nettle Lamium purpureum
 Thyme-leaved Sandwort Arenaria serpyllifolia
 Germander Speedwell Veronica chamaedrys

Brenda Betteridge and Jill Bailey

Aston Upthorpe Downs and Oven Bottom 11 August 2012

A party of six members and two visitors went to this interesting part of the Berkshire Downs (now in Oxfordshire) primarily to see flowers and late summer butterflies. After walking only a few hundred metres we saw our first Chalkhill Blue butterfly, shortly followed by a Peacock and several Meadow Browns. The latter seem to be the only butterfly species in the UK which has not declined in numbers since 2011.

Whilst glancing through a wire fence to look at plants and butterflies we spotted a Dark Bush Cricket. On the other side of the fence we saw Iberis amara, Wild Candytuft. Shortly afterwards we disturbed a perched Buzzard and two Red Kites were also spotted.

After about a kilometre we reached Oven Bottom, a small SSSI at the side of Grimm's Ditch, close to another ancient thoroughfare – the Ridgeway. Here we had lunch before exploring this isolated sheltered spot.

There were many Chalkhill Blue butterflies, perhaps a hundred, including a number of females. The latter are brown and normally seldom seen, since they stay close to the ground, waiting for males to find them. We counted about six Small Heaths, three Marbled Whites and three Brown Argus butterflies. In addition to the butterflies, the flora in this little valley is outstanding.



© Malcolm Brownsword
 Brown Argus aberrant form

We then walked a kilometre or so to the top of what local butterfly enthusiasts call Juniper Valley (for obvious reasons!). While descending the valley we had good views of the enclosed area where Stone Curlews have nested in recent years, but alas none were seen. More Chalkhill Blues were seen and also three Small Coppers before we passed the enclosure where Pasque Flowers struggle to survive. Their petals seem to be considered a delicacy by local small rodents.

Malcolm Brownsword

At the end of the afternoon we stopped for afternoon tea in West Hagbourne

Flowering plants in order of sighting:

Chicory Chichorium intybus
 Hedgerow Cranesbill Geranium pyrenaicum
 Spear Thistle Cirsium vulgare
 Stinging Nettle Urtica dioica
 White Campion Silene latifolia
 Field Bindweed Convolvulus arvensis

Mayweed Tripleurospermum sp.
 Field Forget-me-not Myosotis arvensis
 Hogweed Heracleum sphondylium
 Mugwort Artemisia vulgaris
 Welled Thistle Carduus crispus
 Common Poppy Papaver rhoeas
 Creeping Thistle Cirsium arvense
 Silverweed Potentilla anserina
 Burdock Arctium sp.
 Wild Parsnip Pastinaca sativa
 Common Ragwort Senecio jacobaea
 Cut-leaved Crane's-bill Geranium dissectum
 Agrimony Agrimonia eupatoria
 Greater Knapweed Centaurea scabiosa
 Wild Teasel Dipsacus fullonum
 Knotgrass Polygonum aviculare
 Ribwort Plantain Plantago lanceolata
 Creeping Buttercup Ranunculus repens
 Red Bartsia Odonites vernus
 Dock Rumex sp.
 Wild Basil Clinopodium vulgare
 Black Medick Medicago lupulina
 Perforate St John's-wort Hypericum perforatum
 White Clover Trifolium repens
 Self-heal Prunella vulgaris
 Field Scabious Knautia arvensis
 Yorkshire Fog Holcus lanatus
 Rough Chervil Chaerophyllum temulum
 Golden Mellilot Melilotus altissima
 Dwarf Thistle Cirsium acaule
 Herb Bennet Geum urbanum
 Tufted Vetch Vicia cracca
 Ploughman's Spikenard Inula conyzae
 Wild Candytuft Iberis amara
 Harebell Campanula rotundifolia
 Common Bird's-foot Trefoil Lotus corniculatus
 Smooth Hawk's-beard Crepis capillaris
 Lady's Bedstraw Galium verum
 Red Clover Trifolium pratense
 Clustered Bellflower Campanula glomerata
 Dropwort Filipendula vulgaris
 Eyebright Euphasia nemorosa
 Lesser Hawkbit Leontodon saxatilis
 Soft Brome (Lop Grass) Bromus mollis
 Perennial Ryegrass Lolium perenne
 Scarlet Pimpernel Anagallis arvensis
 Perennial (Corn) Sow-thistle Sonchus arvensis
 Field Speedwell Veronica chamaedrys
 Common Field Speedwell Veronica persica
 Yarrow Achillea millefolium
 Common Mouse-ear Cerastium fontanum
 Wild Mignonette Reseda lutea
 Musk (Nodding) Thistle Carduus nutans
 Thyme-leaved Sandwort Arenaria serpyllifolia
 Common Rockrose Helianthemum nummularium
 Bladder Campion Silene vulgaris
 False Oat-grass Arrhenatherum elatius
 Barren (Sterile) Brome Bromus sterilis
 Small-leaved Timothy Phleum bartoloni
 Fairy (Purging) Flax Linum catharticum
 Burnet-saxifrage Pimpinella saxifraga
 Common Toadflax Linaria vulgaris
 Squinancywort Asperula cynanchica
 Common Knapweed (Hardheads) Centaurea nigra

Tor Grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*
 Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*
 Pale Toadflax *Linaria repens*
 Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*
 Lesser Trefoil *Trifolium dubium*
 White Bryony *Bryonia dioica*
 Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula*
 Common Restharrow *Ononis repens*
 Greater Plantain *Plantago major*
 Woody Nightshade *Solanum dulcamara*
 Nipplewort *Lapsana communis*
 Cleavers (Goosegrass) *Galium aparine*
 Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*
 Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*
 Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*
 Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*
 Oxeye (Moon) Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*
 Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*
 Upright Brome *Bromus erectus*
 Hedge Bedstraw *Galium mollugo*
 Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella*
 Quaking -grass *Briza media*
 Wild Thyme *Thymus polytrichus*
 Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*
 Woolly Thistle *Cirsium eriophorum*
 Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*
 Hedge Bindweed *Calystegia sepium*
 Prickly Lettuce *Lactuca serriola*
 Common Mallow *Malva sylvestris*
 Good King Henry *Chenopodium bonus-henricus*
 Wild Candytuft *Iberis amara* is a Chiltern speciality not Sweet Alison which is usually found on sandy soils by the sea– I got the wrong garden relative! Brenda Betteridge

There is an article about the Brown Argus in September edition of The Countryman. Ed.

MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Carterton May Day Celebrations – tombola

Many thanks to those of you who responded to our request and gave so generously towards the Tombola Stall, Bric-a-brac and plants stand at the Carterton May Day Celebrations. Despite a thoroughly wet and miserable day weatherwise, a hardy band of helpers had an enjoyable time raising £233.40 for club funds.

David Roberts

Bored observations of a tired birder!

In a bird hide at the Bird Fair at Rutland. The Tree Sparrows had failed to make an appearance when I noticed puffs of pollen coming from the flowers of the nearby Stinging Nettles. There was no wind but the pollen was floating away from the flowers. This did not seem to make sense. Later, after running a search on the Internet, it was discovered that some members of the Urticaceae (the nettle family) do not rely entirely on the wind to pollinate their flowers but employ a peculiar and conspicuously specialised mechanism. When the stamens are mature their filaments straighten explosively ejecting the pollen.

Ray Jackson

Bird Brain

The term 'bird brain' is sometimes used to describe senseless actions by humans. Some may say this is derogatory to the avian species which needs to be constantly alert to survive and reproduce in the ever increasing hostility of the natural world. I met with a situation this spring which may point to the origins of this phrase.

I was contacted by a farmer in West Oxfordshire last autumn who wished to erect a dozen nest boxes on his farm under one of the governments's environmental schemes. Consulting a suitable catalogue we choose a selection of nest boxes to hopefully attract a variety of bird species. This included two for House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) – nos 4 and 5, each of which had three adjacent compartments with all three entrance holes at the front. These were

put up on the stable block, with spilled food from the horses readily available. A small flock of House Sparrows being frequently seen at neighbouring buildings of the farm several 100 metres away, we were hoping they would take up residence.

Unfortunately no luck with the House Sparrows this year. However, no. 4 was occupied by a pair of Blue Tits (*Parus caeruleus*). The result was that a nest was built in each of the three compartments. The right-hand nest was fully lined and eventually contained a clutch of 7 eggs and was incubated producing 7 young. The nest in the centre was only partially lined and contained no eggs, while the nest on the left-hand side in which 2 eggs were laid was not quite fully lined – these eggs were not incubated. The birds obviously failed to distinguish between the entrance holes. Nest box no. 5 was occupied by a pair of Great Tits (*Parus major*) with similar results, although eggs were only laid in the right-hand side nest. Not one of these nests was well lined not even the one containing the 7 eggs which was eventually deserted. Sadly the Blue Tits' nest containing the young was predated by a Great-spotted Woodpecker (*Dedrocopos major*) which as the late Chris Mead would have said 'this is perfectly natural'. Nest box no. 4 has been repaired as the existing hole was enlarged by the woodpecker which happens quite often. Metal hole plates have been used on the left- and right-hand sides while the entrance hole in the centre has been sealed to hopefully eliminate confusion! With no. 5 both the left and right entrance holes have been sealed, and following the design of another well-known nest-box manufacturer new entrance holes have been made at each end with hole plates fitted around all three entrances to keep the woodpeckers at bay. We hope and await the 2013 season with interest.

Graham Wren

OBITUARIES

Rev. John Cook

John died on 10 December 2012 aged 100. He attended King's School Canterbury, then Merton College, Oxford (the same year as the politician Airey Neave). He read Biological Sciences, with special attention to beetles. He worked in Burma and then returned to England to be ordained as a priest in the Church of England, ending up, many years later, as rector of Witney. After his wife died in 1990 Yvonne Townsend urged him to join the Field Club, which he greatly enjoyed, going on several holidays with us. He was a member from 1993 to 2007. The last 4 years were spent happily in Madley Park Home.



Adrian State recalls John Cook meeting George McGavin

At a Field Club indoor meeting in our 40th anniversary year of 2003 the speaker was Dr George McGavin, a research associate at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (and now a television personality).

I was talking to Dr McGavin after his talk along with a few others when John joined us and asked if they still had the collection of Hippoboscidae (louse flies) from swifts that were given to the museum collection in the 1930s. Dr McGavin replied in the affirmative, stating that he believed that they were the last specimens collected of that particular species.

To this John replied 'Yes and it was I that collected them'. Dr McGavin looked somewhat startled to find himself confronted by someone who had contributed to the museum's collection some 60 odd years earlier! He asked John a number of questions about the collecting of the specimens and John answered them all with great clarity almost as if he had only recently carried out the task.

This obituary was unavoidably left over from the Spring 2012 Newsletter.

David Holme 1943–2012



Sadly, David passed away in June. He was a member of the Field Club from 1979 to 2010 and was a very keen member in the early days. He came on several club holidays, sometimes with his two sons. He was a primary school teacher and became headmaster of several local schools, including Langford and lastly North Leigh. Older members will remember, with pleasure, the summer parties when we did our own catering, one of which was held at his school at Langford.

Prue Carpenter 1923–2012

Sadly, Prue passed away in September. She was a member from 1989 to 2012 and remained active into old age. She went on several holidays with the Club. She had a lively mind and belonged to at least two other Witney societies – the Music Society and the Fine Arts Society. One particularly fond memory we have of Prue was on a Club visit to the Living Rainforest at Hampstead Norreys when Prue asked if they gave concessions to 'recycled teenagers'! This was the first time we had heard this expression and it seemed to sum up Prue's attitude to life. She trained as a nurse at St Bartholomew's Hospital and worked locally in Thame before she became a social worker in Witney.

Tony Florey

Older newsletters - [95](#) [94](#) [93](#) [92](#) [91](#) [90](#) [89](#) [88](#) [87](#) [86](#)

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