

West Oxfordshire Field Club



Newsletter No. 117 Autumn 2023

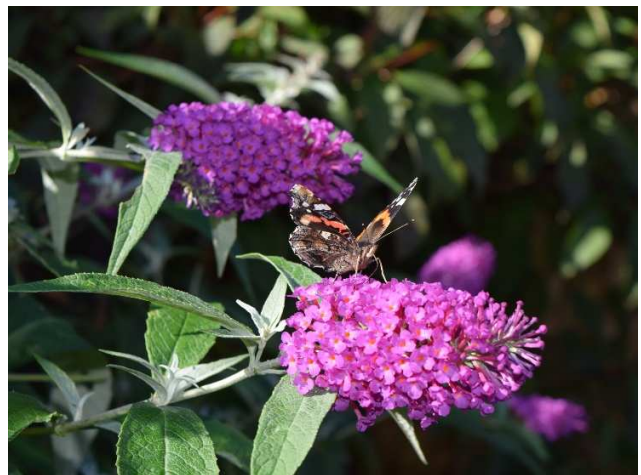
www.thefieldclub.org.uk

EDITORIAL

2023 has been a year of records. After last year's long drought, during which the UK reached its highest recorded temperature, we had a cold winter with many days of ground frost, followed by a extremely wet spring, then a sunny, very hot summer with the hottest June on record, punctuated by some very heavy downpours. This resulted in a lush greening of the countryside, in some places so overgrown with wild clematis and other vegetation as to look almost tropical.

The effects of the changing climate becoming all too obvious in our wildlife. Birds that many of us once flew hundreds of miles to see are now taking up residence here and breeding. Most noticeable are the heron family. I saw my first UK Little White Egret stalking a ditch in Dorset in the 1990s, a Great White Egret wowed WOFC on a club trip to Norfolk some 20 years later, Cattle Egrets first bred on the Somerset Levels in 2008; there is now a colony in Blenheim, and 27

were seen on a local gravel pit lake recently. The attractive little Night Herons bred in 2017 in Somerset and are now popping up in other counties. Always thrilling to see, exotic birds are nothing new – a flock of 8 Bee-eaters was seen at Fulbrook in 1997.

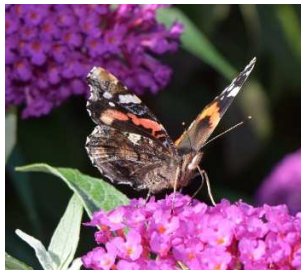


The last butterfly of summer? 24 October 2023

But there have been losses, too. The widespread droughts and wildfires of recent

years have made it difficult for migrating birds to find food before and during migration. Many birds that feed insects to their young have had difficulty synchronising their breeding times with those of the insects. Other species are thriving on the changes. Despite fears that last year's drought would decimate butterfly species, the recent Big Butterfly count showed the best result in four summers. Red Admirals, which usually migrate back to Africa in winter, were up 400% this year, and may even overwinter here eventually.

The popularity of re-wilding is having many successes, from birds and beavers to butterflies. Many newly resurrected water meadows and other wetlands are providing corridors along which wildlife can migrate as the climate warms. The Club



has toured the Chimney Meadows and the Earth Trust's at River of Life Project at Little Wittenham.

Citizen Science, where members of the public help to record species, is increasingly important for mapping all these changes. In its 60-year life, the Club has witnessed these changes and our speakers have kept us informed about events further afield. It has been a joy to explore nature together – many eyes spot more than one can. The club records species on its outings – the website blogs contain links to the relevant species lists, as

well as lots of glorious pictures. We are grateful to our walks leaders and programme organisers for helping us to recognise and enjoy the great wealth of wildlife in West Oxfordshire and beyond.

Jill Bailey

Appleton Lower Common, 23 April 2023

Field Club walks are usually not very challenging, but this one was different: it was variously described as an obstacle course or even an adventure. Despite the challenges, we found what we had gone to look for and people enjoyed the adventure, or at least seemed to.

Ten of us met in late afternoon on Sunday 23 April for a three-mile walk at Appleton Lower Common SSSI, a 47 hectare, 400-year-old woodland, mainly oak and ash on clay soil (so



rather different from the limestone or chalk we are more used to). The hope was to find Town Hall Clocks aka Moschatel aka THC's (*Adoxa moschatellina*) (left) and other spring flowers, and

to hear some summer migrants singing.

Fortunately, everyone who came had heeded the rather panicky email I sent two days before and came equipped with wellies. It was clear to everyone why wellies were necessary as soon as we left the layby where the footpath was four inches deep in sticky mud. After we'd squelched a few hundred metres along the edge of the wood we came to a clearing where we found a few THC's at the base of the trees as well as violets and stitchwort. Some nearby rotting logs yielded two kinds of slime mould: Wolf's Milk (*Lycogala epidendrum*) and the tiny white *Ceratiomyxa fruticulosa* var. *porioides*. The Wolf's Milk had changed from orange-pink to khaki in the couple of days since I did the recce (see below).



Younger Wolf's Milk



Older Wolf's Milk

From there we entered an open field by the edge of the wood where the going was easier, but it then started to rain heavily. At the bottom of the field we met our first real obstacle – a stile with the cross-piece missing. Most of us clambered over but the thinner ones were able to slip through the dog gate at the side. We then made a quick detour to Hart's Bridge (Rainbow Bridge) over the Thames. Lots of Lady's Smock was flowering in the meadow on the far side.

People were curious about the ruins we passed close to Hart's Bridge. There was originally a weir and they were probably the ruins of the weir keeper's cottage, which used to be a pub for traffic on the river. I believe it was functioning until the mid-20th century.

An enormous clap of thunder had us jumping out of our skins before we got back to the woods and encountered the second major obstacle – the swamp! It's always wet in that corner, but I had never seen it that wet before in the forty years I've lived in the area. The water was at least six inches deep and there was no way round; the logs that someone had put down as a bridge were lethally slippery. Pete Bennion's photo (above) says it all! But we got across with dry feet – just.



After a few hundred more metres of muddy bridleway we reached a gravelled road, where there was a very nice large group of THC's (picture at top of page) as well as Primroses and Violets. It had stopped raining, some Blackcaps were singing and a Willow Warbler was heard in the distance.

A bit further on we were faced with the choice of returning by the road (not very interesting but dry) or taking another bridleway through the woods and then having to face the obstacles in reverse. Chocolate biscuits lifted everyone's spirits; two people opted for the road and the rest of us headed back into the woods. There were quite a lot of fungi, including Oak Mazegill, King Alfred's Cakes and logs stained green-blue by Green Elf-cups. Close to the entrance to the woods some Goldilocks buttercups were just about to flower. (Everything is late this year.) We also found a rather attractive small sedge, but weren't able to identify it.

We negotiated the swamp and the stile successfully for the second time; on the way

back through the field a couple of hares were seen and someone with very sharp eyes spotted an Orange Tip roosting on a Dandelion clock. I had hoped to see a Barn Owl, which are often seen there – there's a box nearby – but the damp weather had probably stopped them from flying.

Soon we were back at the layby and, although there were fewer plants in flower and less bird song than we had hoped for, we found the

THCs and – remarkably! – everyone seemed to have enjoyed our rather unusual adventure.

John Cobb

Otmoor RSPB Reserve, 27 April 2023



It was a bit grey and chilly on the 27th of April when ten of us met with volunteers Sylfest Muldal and his colleague Mike for a three-hour, highly enjoyable walk at the RSPB Otmoor Reserve.

It was a productive morning, with wonderful sightings of a huge variety of birds. Perhaps the highlight of the visit was seeing two Hobbies perching on fence posts waiting for the weather to warm up before hunting, then later watching one of them set off overhead.

It was really helpful to have expert birders to identify bird calls. A Water Rail gave a good rendition of a stuck pig and warblers were heard in abundance, particularly Sedge and Reed Warblers, each of which gave a brilliant and elongated display of song so that we could really learn to differentiate between the two. ‘Rhythmic Reed’ and ‘Scratchy Sedge’!

A further hint on how to identify the Lesser Whitethroat is that its song sounds like an engine turning. It does!

As the weather warmed up, we spotted several Common Lizards climbing over fallen branches on a South-facing bank. They were tiny and almost certainly juveniles. Later a Grass Snake was seen near to the water beside the path. Sylfest showed us a female St Marks Fly, full of eggs. A good meal for a Chiffchaff, apparently!

As we headed back, the sky darkened and the first spots of rain began to fall just as we were getting into our cars. Heavy rain then set in for the rest of the day, so we were incredibly lucky to be able to enjoy a great morning’s birdwatching before the downpour.

Julia Reed

Dawn Chorus, 7 May 2023

A walk to hear the dawn chorus has been a fixed event on the Club's programme for as long as I can remember and, once a year, it's certainly worth getting up at 3:30a.m. to hear the birds waking up. It's also a good opportunity to learn birdsong.

Dawn chorus walks used to be well-attended, but this year only five of us met at Minster Lovell at 4a.m. on Sunday 7 May. From there we walked slowly to Crawley and back to Minster Lovell on the opposite side of the Windrush. Unusually, it was very mild – it can get very, very cold at dawn, even in May – and rather damp and misty.

The first bird we heard, at 04:13 was a Woodpigeon; a Skylark was fourth on the list at 04:25. It was twilight and we watched a bat feeding over the river from the wooden bridge. By 5a.m. we had only got as far as a small wood (very muddy and slippery underfoot!) by the river, but the birds were in full voice and we had already 'ticked' nineteen or twenty species. In fact, they were in such full voice that it was difficult to pick out individual songs. We expected to see a Barn Owl when we came out of the woods – there are two owl boxes in the area – but were out of luck this year.

From then on, new species came more slowly. A Whitethroat sang from a hedge near Maggots Grove, followed by a Blackcap and a Chiffchaff. The climb up to Dry Lane was steep and slippery. At the bottom of the track on the other side, Alison rescued a Brimstone Moth that had somehow got into a puddle and put it on a branch to dry out (I hope it survived its drenching).

We spent some time at Crawley Bridge, which can usually be quite productive – it's

not uncommon to see Grey Wagtails there – but the river was very high and we added nothing new. A little after 6:30, while we were admiring the view of the Windrush Valley from the top of Farm Lane in Crawley (one of my very favourite views), Adrian was remarking that we hadn't seen any raptors, when a Buzzard obligingly appeared on the horizon.



Windrush Valley from Crawley

On the way back to Minster Lovell we saw three European Hares in the same field as some Red-legged Partridges, confirming my pet theory that if there are partridges, hares can't be far away.

We usually expect to hear and see between 40 and 50 species on a dawn chorus walk but we had only logged thirty-nine by 8:10 when we got back to our cars, so we continued on to the village where we picked up 3 more to bring the total to 42. In terms of the number of species this may not have been the best dawn chorus walk that I've been on but, as usual, I enjoyed the treat of the full English breakfast we had afterwards!

Thanks to Adrian for leading the walk and compiling the species list.

John Cobb

Chimney Meadows Wetland Restoration Project, 15 May 2023

Following Lisa Lane's excellent talk about the Chimney Meadows Restoration Project in February, on Monday 15 May 2023 thirteen Field Club members met with Lisa once again to see the Project for ourselves. We were lucky in that it was a dry, fairly sunny day, although the wind was chilly.

As we walked towards the wetland site, Lisa told us about her vision for Nature in the Thames Valley and how Chimney has become the hub for biodiversity at the centre of the Thames Valley.

The site was originally used for mixed farming, so once under BBOWT supervision, the aim was to revert the land back to hay meadows and species rich pasture. This initially involved fields being grazed by sheep. Glyphosate was then applied to kill off weeds. After that the land was harrowed, rolled and then seed-filled green hay from the National Nature Reserve was spread over the fields. The aim has been to keep the phosphate levels as low as possible to encourage a variety of wildflowers such as Cowslips, Meadow Rue and Knapweed. As a result, insects and birds have increased in number, including Meadow Pipits, Snipe and Stonechats.

Lisa pointed out three slightly different methods of field management. In one field the hay is cut in late July and then grazed by either black Hebridean sheep or Dexter cattle. In another field, where ridge and furrow is apparent, the land is only grazed. On a third, the land is grazed once every two years with no revision. Temporary ponds lie on the land, acting as a draw for insects. Each field has its own ecology as a result of these different methods of management.

We walked on, crossing the cut to the South side of the Thames then towards the weir, stopping to watch the Banded Demoiselles flying near the water. Crossing the weir, we could now see the focus of our visit, the Duxford Loop, a 450-metre channel, created as a bypass to help fish get around the weir and lock and thus reach the upper Thames. It was a massive project, taking over two years and costing around two million pounds, but now it can be seen in its full glory, a meandering flow with plenty of life within it and attracting wildlife around it. The channel allows 50% out-of-bank flooding which then returns, leaving a layer of rich silt on the surrounding land and lowering the potential for major flooding downstream. As yet there are very few trees around the channel but some, such as Alder and willow, may be planted. However, the intention is to manage as little as possible and to see what happens, allowing Nature to take its course.



New Duxford Loop

Treading carefully over the marshy ground, we noticed several 'collars and domes'. These small constructions aid research into carbon levels by measuring the release of carbon from wet and dry ground. Findings so far appear to suggest that less carbon is released from wet ground than from dry, highlighting the importance of increasing wetland areas.

Looking over the previously flooded ground (there have been three flood events this winter), we spotted a Curlew, a pair of Oystercatchers, a Little Egret, Greylag and Canada Geese and Mallards. Wigeon, Snipe, Teal and Garganey have also been seen over the winter; mayflies and alderflies were starting to emerge.



Mayfly (L) and alderfly (R)

We returned, stopping to look at two scrapes created (with some difficulty on soft clay!) and which should attract waders such as Lapwing and Golden Plover.

Taking a slightly different route back to the Office, we stopped for a view from the small hide from which you get an idea of the enormous size of the wetlands. We were accompanied by the incessant song of a Reed Warbler.

It was a fascinating and inspiring morning. This has been a huge project with a brilliant outcome and hats off to those who have made it work. A particular thank you, too, to Lisa for her time and enthusiasm.

Julia Reid

Aston Upthorpe Down, 28 May 2023

On the warm, balmy afternoon of Sunday 28 May, twenty-two of us wandered down Hill Valley at Aston Upthorpe. While we were being serenaded by Blackcaps and Whitethroats, we soon identified several butterflies: Common Blue, Brimstone, Peacock and Small Whites. Once we were on a rough chalk and flint hillside, there were the Dingy Skippers (below) and to our delight what we thought was the rare Grizzled Skipper.



The newly opening flowers were also a delight, particularly big clumps of Sweet Rocket and the magenta-coloured Clustered Bellflower (see below). However, it was mason bees who stole the show. We had noticed one carrying a little stick just as though riding on a broomstick, as in David Attenborough's TV

series of the Wild Isles. It carried the stick to its nest under a neat pile of tiny sticks. Alison broke up more tiny sticks to give it an easy supply. To our amazement, it ferried them the six-inch journey to the nest, picking up the sticks and putting them in a pile. The female Two-coloured Mason Bee (*Osmia bicolor*) lays an egg in an empty snail shell which she then disguises with a pile of sticks (below). Extraordinary!



Further on in this Thyme and Marjoram carpeted SSSI, we found the desiccated but very recognisable form of a young Adder.

We crossed over to the open downland, where Juniper trees and Sheep's Sorrel grew. Wonderful views across to the Thames Valley. More newly blooming flowers – Field Pansies, fumitory (which is sown in seed mixes as a food source for Turtle Doves) and Yellow Rattle to name just three. Back to the insects, I learned that the bright scarlet and black Burnet Moth's body cyanide, hence the warning colour.

Our last treat, and following on from John and Sue's blog, we spotted a Glow-worm larva, making its slow



but determined way across the path to get to the blades of grass ready to pupate and eventually glow in the dark.

A rich afternoon was rounded off by the warm welcome of tea and cakes in Malcolm and Valerie's beautiful garden where we admired a crab spider on one of their doronicums.

It was all that the Field Club is famed for – camaraderie, team learning and enjoyment of the natural world. Thank you, Malcolm, for leading it.

Elaine Steane

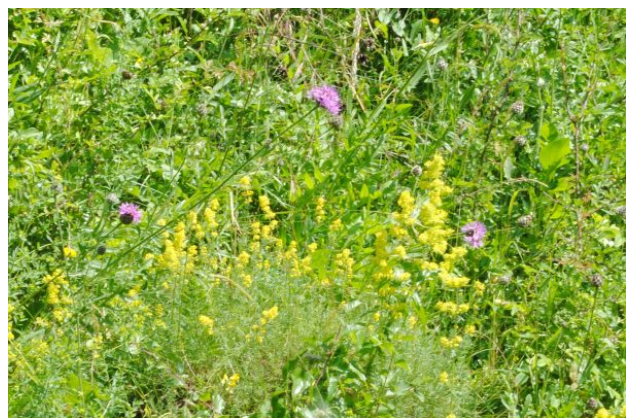
Pauline Flick Reserve, 25 June 2023

Perhaps it was too hot, but only four people joined Jan Guilbride for an extremely interesting two-hour stroll in the Pauline Flick reserve, near Great Rollright, on the morning of Sunday 25 June.

The half-mile path through the reserve winds its way along the disused Cheltenham to Banbury railway line, which closed in 1969. This stretch of line had a number of owners after its closure and was monitored locally by Pauline Flick who lived at Limekiln House. Pauline died in 2001 and the site was given to Banbury Ornithological Society in 2001. Jan Guilbride has been Reserve Manager since 2018.

We headed up the path quietly, looking for any wildlife and plants of interest. At the far end, Jan discussed the history and use of the site and her thoughts about management, which involves tractor mowing and hedge flailing in September each year to allow access and also to control invasive plants such as Wild Clematis, Hawthorn and brambles.

Jan has cleared large swathes of the path to allow for light while keeping short stretches of shade to encourage a diversity of species. Hawthorn predominates if it is allowed to, so much of it has been cut back and other tree species planted. As a result, there is a rich diversity of both plants and wildlife. Although it was midday and the birds were



Scabious and Lady's Bedstraw on a sunny bank

quiet, there were several species of butterfly active, as well as a variety of hoverfly species; a black and yellow longhorn beetle was feeding on a scabious. A few Twayblades – past their best – were growing in the shadier

places as well as a fair number of Common Spotted Orchids, all protected from mowing. The reserve also supports a colony of Glow-worms, which seems to be spreading, and we spent some time discussing how best to manage the reserve for them.



Black-&-yellow Longhorn

Hoverfly on Knapweed

Two interesting examples from Jan's collections of findings were cherry stones nibbled by Wood Mice and a Harvest Mouse nest found attached to a blade of grass in the autumn. Management of such a site is

Moth morning, 1 July 2023

As always, Moth Morning on Saturday 1 July was a success, attracting a full quota of members. Despite it being cloudy, breezy, and cool with an occasional shower, there were plenty of moths collected overnight in the three traps.



Small Elephant Hawk Moth

Probably the most spectacular moths trapped were the Poplar Hawkmoth and Elephant Hawkmoth, but there were also some really

constant but the results are well worth the effort. A bird count is undertaken every three to four weeks.

The advantage of being such a small group was that Jan could talk at length about the reserve and discuss options for its management. Should there be more or less intervention? Should access only be allowed with permission? What to do about Ash die-back?

We all thoroughly enjoyed the morning and learned much more than can be noted in this report. Many thanks to Jan for giving up her Sunday morning to show us the reserve.

Julia Reid

beautiful moths with intricate markings as well as the Swallow-tail, a delicate pure white moth. The Buff Tip was of particular interest too, wonderfully camouflaged, looking just like a birch twig.

Apparently, there are fewer moths around compared with last year. Julian (the visiting expert) thinks that last summer's drought and excessive heat is the probable cause, leading to shortage of food. Additionally, the dry ground probably prevented pupae from burrowing into the earth.

Croissants and hot drinks were very welcome after the event. Many thanks to Mary Elford and Julian, and also to Veronica for hosting the morning in her beautiful garden.

Julia Reid

Wychwood Forest Fair, 9 July 2023

The Club had a stand in the marquee at the Wychwood Forest Fair at Foxburrow Wood, on Sunday 9 July, again this year.

It's a good opportunity to publicise ourselves, and also to talk to people from similar organisations under one roof. Being in the marquee is also good when it rains – which it often does – as we then have a captive audience when people rush in to take shelter!

We had our usual quiz, which is a good way of getting to talk to people, and someone I chatted to that day came along to our Glow-worm walk a few days later. A big thank you

to the members who came along to help on the stand on the day.



The Quiz

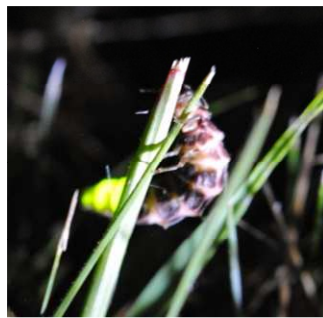
Sue Morton

Glow-worms at Swinbrook, 12 July 2023

Ten of us met near Swinbrook church in the evening of 12 July for a walk in the area followed by a hunt for Glow-worms after dark (see female glowing, below).

glowing once they have mated, so quite a few of the ones we had seen a few days earlier had got lucky (or been eaten or trodden on) in the meantime.

The evening was warm but overcast and slightly damp. We didn't see many flowers on the walk to Hit or Miss and back to Swinbrook via the road, but it was nice to find some Wild Liquorice; Handley Plain was disappointing florally – it can sometimes be quite good – because it had been grazed by sheep and very recently cut.



The Club has been visiting Swinbrook churchyard for many years, as it is easily accessible and a fairly reliable place to see Glow-worms at the right time of year (mid-June to late July). I don't think we have ever failed to see any, but numbers do vary. On our recce a few days earlier, John and I saw 17 glowing females, but we only found 8 with the Club this year. Female glow-worms stop

As usual, John reported our sightings to the UK Glow-worm survey. We visited Swinbrook four times this year, never failing to find any, even on 11 August, which really is the end of their glowing season, when we found four in the long grass in the lane adjacent to the churchyard, but none in the

churchyard, where the grass was short. We both thought that their glows were very dim and concluded that they had probably been glowing for a long time and had almost used up their reserves of energy (they don't feed after pupation).

For the record, the first glowing females (5) we saw were on 9 June, and a larva at Worsham on 26 May.

Sue Morton

Butterfly Walk at Charlbury, 20 July 2023

Despite the recent unsettled weather, our butterfly hunt on 20 July struck lucky with the elements, and fine, calm conditions netted a fully subscribed haul of members, and a good range of butterflies too.

Seventeen of us, including two visitors from north of the border, assembled in the courtyard behind Charlbury's library where our well-informed guide, Roger Newman, briefed us with ID charts and recommended some useful books and apps for the UK's Big Butterfly Count, running until 6 August this year. Amazingly, this is the biggest 'Citizen Science' project in the world, a critical piece of research aimed at learning more about the disturbing decline of 80% of our native species in recent years.



Shaded Broad-bar

On this sobering note, we set off to explore a varied mix of habitats around the town: Charlbury's cemetery, allotments, playing fields, and the sloping glades and meadows of the Wigwell Nature Reserve.

Our first stop was a Buddleia on a garden lane, where we were cheered to find half a dozen different butterflies, including Red Admirals and Peacocks, Large Whites, Commas and Meadow Browns. A promising start. Later we added to the list with Small Coppers, Gatekeepers, Small- and Essex-

Skippers, Small Tortoiseshells, Brimstones and Marbled Whites, as well as a few interesting moths (6-spot Burnets and a Hummingbird Hawkmoth).



Essex Skipper

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Roger showed us how to distinguish those confusing brown things by the white spots on their wings, or the colours of their antennae tips. Apparently, it is incorrect to refer to 'Cabbage Whites' these days, but the ones we saw in the allotments were most definitely just that, battering in frustration at the netting around the brassicas.

The plant-hunters were rewarded by dozens of different species in the nature reserve, while birders were delighted to note a few Swifts screeching overhead, and to hear a Yellowhammer singing its cheesy refrain at full throttle on a distant tree.

Thanks to Roger for his knowledge and leading the walk.

Lindsay Fisher

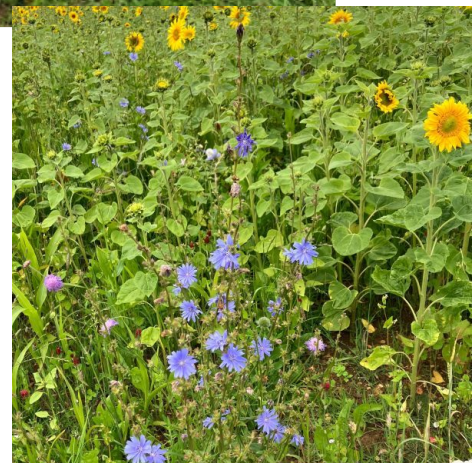
Farm Ed Walk 3 August 2023

Sixteen members signed up for the FarmEd walk before the Club's 60th birthday. We learned a great deal from Danielle, our walk leader, who gave us a short introduction about the aims of the not-for-profit organisation at Honeydale Farm, i.e. "to inspire, educate and connect people to build sustainable farming and food systems that nourish people and regenerate the planet".



We looked at the soil from two different fields of wheat, one grown traditionally, and one with a heritage crop that had been grown without fertilisers or other inputs; Roger Newman told us about the small Cotswold Stone wall built by volunteers, and we saw many beautiful wildflowers growing nearby, such as Wild Carrot and Chicory. One of the fields was full of lovely sunflowers and rows of trees have been planted between the fields to provide shade.

Volunteers' stone wall



Sunflowers, Chicory

So much to learn, lots of questions and not enough time because lunch was waiting! Fascinating and hopeful for all of us who care about the planet.

Maggie Collins

60th Birthday Lunch, 3 August 2023

The Club is 60 years old this year, and we marked the occasion with a lunch on 3 August at FarmEd, near Shipton under Wychwood.



We had a small display of photographs of Club activities and newsletters from the past 60 years, and it was fun to revisit past events and to see what some of us looked like before we had grey hair!



After a very good lunch, a large and magnificent cake was wheeled in and admired, before being cut by Malcolm Brownsword, one of our Vice Presidents. It was then expertly cut up by one of FarmEd's staff before being distributed to those present.

Before everyone dispersed, we had a group photo outside, overlooking the lovely view of the Evenlode valley. The finishing touch for me was a Speckled Bush Cricket that hitched a lift on someone's shoulder and was removed outside to have its portrait taken before being released back into the long grass!

Sue Morton

Spiders and Insects at North Leigh Common

On the mercifully cooler afternoon of Sunday 10 September following a week of temperatures regularly reaching 30° C, a group of non-arachnophobes assembled at North Leigh Common for an excursion led by Lawrence Bee. Lawrence's background was in ecological and environmental education, and he has co-written several beautifully illustrated books on the spiders and insects.

We were introduced to the various methods used for sampling and monitoring. These included an ingenious method for temporarily securing a specimen which involved the use of two transparent plastic pots, some cling film, and high-density polystyrene foam; a modified garden leaf-vacuum which sucked specimens into a net bag; an inverted umbrella-like contraption which, when held under the branches of a tree, collected whatever fell out when a branch was shaken and, more conventionally, fabric nets which collected specimens when whisked through the vegetation.



Your reporter was somewhat daunted by Lawrence's extensive knowledge of his subject given the vast and varied number of different families, genera, let alone species, that exist among the spiders, bugs and insects!

We easily found numerous specimens which were tipped into white trays to help make

them more visible. There follows a beginner's random list of a few of the many fascinating specimens seen and issues discussed:



Garden Spider (*Araneus diadematus*)

There are six species of house spiders. If you put a house spider outdoors it will try to come back in!

Eye patterns are used to identify some species. Clearly this must be done under a microscope back in the lab.

Wolf spiders do not make a web, they catch their prey by out-running it.

The Lesser Garden Spider (*Metellina segmentata*) which is abundant in the UK, has a distinctive 'tuning fork' pattern on its carapace and is venomous (but not to humans).

Garden spiders have a large abdomen and always have complex white markings; immature specimens are rarely able to be identified since their specific individual features do not appear until adulthood. The one in the picture is *Araneus diadematus*, recognisable by the white abdominal cross. Running crab spiders, like many others, do not spin webs. Orb web spiders are the only ones to have a web with a solid centre. Web spinning spiders usually have an open centre for the spider to lurk in.

The Triangle Spider (*Hyptiotes parxadoxus*) is non-venomous, but catches its prey in a

triangular shaped taut web which collapses and enwraps the prey, which is then injected with an enzyme which liquifies it so that the spider can suck it dry!

It was a very informative and enjoyable excursion.

John Baker

In the Footsteps of Dinosaurs

Thirteen of us met with leader John Baker in Stonesfield Church car park on the grey but dry Sunday morning of 17 September. Owen Green from the Oxford Geology Trust came along too, so we had a full quota of geology experts! Thus began a fascinating and rather exciting morning of discovery.



Before setting off, John showed us examples of marine fossils that have been found in the Stonesfield area. This got our eye in for what to look for on our walk. He also gave us each a handout containing explanatory diagrams and information (on website).



Fossils in Taynton limestone

We moved to the churchyard where we could see a good example of Stonesfield slate roofing. John pointed out gravestones made from iron ore, noticeable by their rust colour and the way the engraving is still very distinct and unweathered, unlike limestone gravestones. Iron ore was quarried in Fawler where there is, apparently, a tunnel underneath the road (yet to be discovered!).

John planned our walk so that there were three stopping points:

The first was in a glade on the top of the hill where there are numerous examples of chippings from the creation of slate tiles. Many of these contain marine fossil remains and we found several different examples of these.

Shortly afterwards we sat down on some logs at an entrance to what is sometimes known as ‘The Dinosaur Field’ where there is an information board. John then produced the lower jawbone (actually a replica!) of a *Megalosaurus*, *Megalosaurus bucklandii*, which was found in the area and was the very first dinosaur to be scientifically described. It was carnivorous and about eight metres long. The Stonesfield area was a rich source of not only fossils, but bones of prehistoric animals and the local slate miners used to supplement their income by selling them. The original *Megalosaurus* bones are now in the Oxford University Museum of Natural History.

Walking down to the river we learned about the geomorphology of the area and how the steep banks of the valley were created from the melted water at the end of the peri-glacial period of the Anglian period, 400,000 years ago. The smaller valleys were tributaries for the same huge mass of water.

Our third stop was by Spratt's Barn, now a private house, the site of a slate mine, (now covered over), where a tunnel, about 3-4 feet deep runs in a semi-circle under the road. It must certainly have been a tough life for a slate digger, digging out and then lifting heavy slate in all weathers. Their job wasn't finished until they had split the slate into tiles and then drilled a hole by hand for roof hanging.



Jawbone of a Megalosaurus

This was a really enjoyable and informative outing, much appreciated by all who came along, so many thanks to John Baker.

Julia Reid



The head of Stocky Bottom

YOUR NEWSLETTER

A big thank you to everyone who contributed reports and pictures for this issue, and to our programme planners and walks leaders for a really diverse and interesting summer of outings. You can find the species lists for most of the walks on our website or request them from me if you are not online.