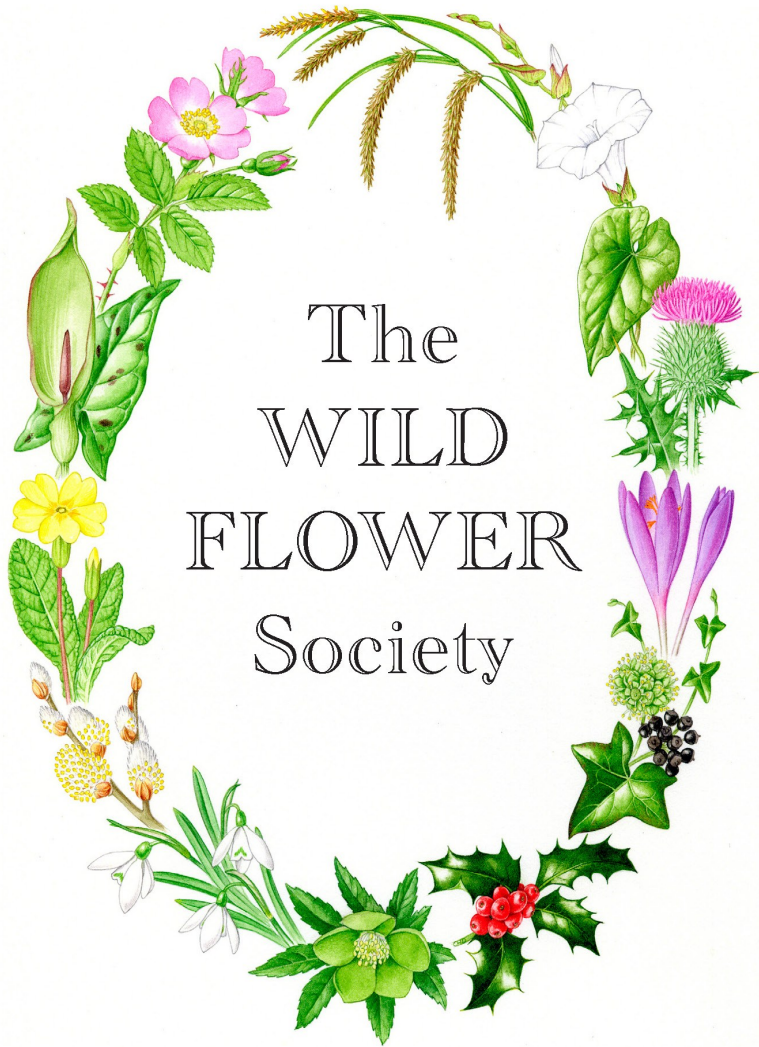


WILD FLOWER MAGAZINE



WINTER 2026

WILD FLOWER MAGAZINE

Published four times a year by The Wild Flower Society

Presidents: 1886-1948	Mrs E.V. Dent, O.B.E.
1948-1956	Miss H.S.A. Dent
1956-1994	Mrs C.M.R. Schwerdt, M.B.E. (nee V.V.C. Dent)
1994-1997	Prof. D. Bellamy, O.B.E.
1997-2000	Mr D. McClintock
2000-2002	Mr R.S.R. Fitter
2002-2003	Mr R.M. Burton
2003-2025	Prof. Sir Ghilleen Prance, F.R.S.
2026	Dr. Alan Leslie

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Farewell

I have just submitted my resignation as the President of the Wild Flower Society with much regret. After 22 years as your President, it is certainly time for a change. I leave the post purely for personal reasons because, with my responsibilities as a full-time carer for my wife, I am not able to attend WFS meetings and my botanising is mainly confined to within the boundaries of Plymouth.

It has been a great pleasure to be President of the Society that my Aunt Gertrude introduced me to when I was just ten years old. The gift of membership and of a Wild Flower Diary helped to propel me on to a lifelong career in botany. Hence, I remain an enthusiast of the WFS and look forward to continuing as a member. I still have some of my childhood diaries and three of my aunt's diaries from the 1930s.

During my time as President, I have taken you around the world in my letters as I have travelled. For the present, I am more confined to home, but I am enjoying writing about many things from my travels and my research. Next month, my new book about the Brazil Nut will be published, telling you more than you would ever want to know about this important Amazonian tree. The book tells you about the pollination of the flowers by bees, the dispersal of the seeds by

the agouti, a rodent that buries the seeds in caches, and about the legends and recipes of the indigenous peoples. The aim of this book is to promote the sustainable harvesting of this nutritious crop by the indigenous peoples. Brazil nuts and other non-timber forest products can be harvested without cutting down the forest. By preserving tribal forest reserves and encouraging the residents to make an income from the sale of their products, we can help both to preserve the Amazon rainforest and its true inhabitants.

My hope today is that WFS will recruit more young people, encouraging them towards interesting and exciting careers in botany. The diaries that you keep about flowering times are a most valuable source of information about climate change. I urge you to continue to do all you can to halt climate change, one of the biggest threats to our precious wild flowers. Your presidency is in good hands with Alan Leslie and I wish him a long and successful tenure as he leads us forward.

GHILLEAN PRANCE, FLS, FRS,
FRSB

The President's Letter in the following (Spring) magazine will be from our new President Dr. Alan Leslie.

An appreciation of our retiring President, Sir Ghilleen Prance FLS, FRS, FRSB

It is with mixed emotions, profound gratitude tinged with real sadness, that we say goodbye to Sir Ghilleen Prance FRS as President of the Wild Flower Society, a role he has fulfilled since 2003.

For over twenty years, Sir Ghilleen has been far more than a figurehead. He has been a true friend, someone who has genuinely cared about our Society and our mission to bring the enjoyment of field botany to our members. Season after season, he has written articles for our quarterly magazines, sharing not just botanical facts, but the infectious enthusiasm that has driven his lifetime's work in the tropical rainforests and beyond. Through his words, we have travelled with him to distant lands, understood the global effects of climate change and learned to see our own British flora with fresh eyes.

Those of us fortunate enough to have attended the Members' Weekends when Sir Ghilleen was present will remember the warmth of his presence and the generosity with which he engaged with everyone, from the newest member to the most seasoned field botanist.

Despite a career that has taken him around the world, describing more than 200 plant species, leading major Amazon expeditions and directing the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Sir Ghilleen has consistently made time

for us. He has helped select the Presidents' Prize recipients, understanding that recognising both professional and amateur botanists matters deeply to our community. We were pleased to have him present the awards in 2014 and 2016 at our Members' Weekends, his genuine delight in the winners' achievements evident to all.

When the Wild Flower Society ventured into the unfamiliar territory of online winter meetings, Sir Ghilleen embraced the new format with characteristic enthusiasm. His talks, whether on the temperate rainforests of Britain, the profound botanical knowledge of Amazonian peoples, or his description of extraordinary pollination mechanisms of tropical plants, brought our scattered membership together and reminded us why we fell in love with botany in the first place.

Although Sir Ghilleen is stepping down from his role as President, he wishes to remain a member of the Society, but we still want him to know how much his presidency has meant to us. He didn't just lend us his distinguished name; he gave us his time, his knowledge, his stories, and his genuine affection. We will miss his contributions greatly, but we say goodbye with our deepest thanks and warmest wishes for the future.

PETER LLEWELLYN

Copy deadline: 1st February 2026 for the Spring magazine.

EDITORIAL

I send my personal best wishes and grateful thanks to Sir Ghilleen Prance, who has provided his excellent 'Letters' for our magazine over the past 22 years.

short. It would be far too long to explain the many, mainly computer-related problems, I have encountered since the last magazine.

KEN SOUTHALL

My editorial this time is to be very

NOTICES

WFS website Members' Page and email updates:

The WFS website has a password-protected Members' Page. This is in the dropdown menu under the 'About' tab. This page is a secure space for members to find the emails of Branch Secretaries, a downloadable version of the Year Book, AGM minutes and other members' documents. The Members' Page password for 2026 is **mayweed8a**.

WFS sends out email updates. If you are not receiving these, that means we don't know your current email address. You can sign up to the newsletter by clicking on the link on the website or by emailing: website.wfs@gmail.com.

A message from Anna Robson, Associate Collections Curator for Biology at the Yorkshire Museum.

A new temporary display, titled The Life and Work of Botanist Catherine 'Kit' Rob: An Insider's Look at the Yorkshire Museum's Herbarium is now open at the Yorkshire Museum. Exhibited in the foyer of the Yorkshire Museum, it is free to visit and many of the specimens on display come from the Kit Rob herbarium. This display of plant specimens is a brand new interpretation of the Yorkshire Museum's biology collection. The Catherine Muriel Rob collection represents the small number of female collectors we have in the natural science collection. Rob was a leading Yorkshire botanist helped to compile the Collins Pocket Guide to British Wildflowers. This display has been supplemented by items from the Borthwick Institute of Archives at the University of York, where Kit's personal archive is housed. Generously on loan are one of Kit Rob's Wild Flower Society Journals and a membership card from the Catherine Muriel Rob Natural History Society, the charity set up in her name after her death.

The exhibition is set to run from 1st December 2025 to 31st May 2026. We really encourage members of the Wild Flower Society to come and visit this free display. For more information or to arrange a visit with Anna Robson, please contact Anna at anna.robson@ymt.org.uk.

Uncredited photographs in this magazine are by the editor.

WILD FLOWER SOCIETY AGM AND MEMBERS' WEEKEND

6th - 7th SEPTEMBER 2025

This year's Members' Weekend was based around Taunton, Somerset, with the AGM taking place at the village hall, West Monkton. In a change to recent practice, the Branch Secretaries' meeting moved online and took place on the evening of Tuesday 2nd September. Field meetings were held on the Saturday morning at Longrun Meadow, on the edge of Taunton, and on the Sunday at Avalon Marshes, in the Somerset Levels. Reports of these can be found on pages 8 and 10.

AGM:

Only the main points of the AGM will be reported here, with the full minutes appearing on the website. If you are unable to access these and would like a copy, please write to Carol Armstrong, the General Secretary, enclosing a stamped, addressed A5 envelope (contact details inside the back cover).

The AGM was attended by 46 members, for seven of whom this was their first time.

Peter Llewellyn, our Chairman, welcomed those present before outlining the recent changes in Branch Secretary roles as follows:

East Anglia Branch: Stephen Clarkson retiring, Sue Southall taking over;

Midlands Branch: Mary and Claire Smith retiring, John

and Monika Walton taking over;

Kent Branch: Geoffrey Kitchener retiring, Sue Buckingham taking over;

Greater London: Sue Buckingham retiring, Jane Lowe taking over;

10km Square Study (North): Jesse Tregale sadly died quite suddenly in June, Keith Robson taking over.

Robin Blades, our Treasurer, reminded us that the 2024 accounts had been circulated with the Summer 2025 magazine. Subscription income in the General Fund was significantly higher than in 2023 because of the increase in the membership fee. In this regard, as many members pay by standing order, which has to be changed manually, this had not been a painless process, with some people not changing the amount and others ending up paying twice. Robin thanked Membership Secretary, Sue Poyser, for dealing with the various issues that had arisen.

Other General and Grants and Development Fund income was similar to 2023, with the exception of a very generous legacy received that year (2023). This legacy had been taken into account under the Society's Reserves Policy, which determines what we can spend on grants to other organisations or individuals who are able to do things

in support of our charitable aims which are not practical for the Society itself to do. The outcome was a total grants figure of £9,900, the highest in WFS history. A new item included in the grants was sponsorship of Botanical University Challenge, an event designed to encourage interest in botany among university students, a group which our existing activities do not easily reach.

General Fund expenditure in 2024 was broadly similar to that in 2023. There was a slight increase in the value of our investments during 2024, though this has since decreased by some 2.24%. In 2025, our Gift Aid claim went up in line with last year's subscription increase. Robin requested those who have not already signed up for Gift Aid to consider doing so. Grant awards in 2025 continued at a similarly high level to 2024.

Robin paid tribute to Rodney Burton, our former Chairman, who died in 2024 and was a great influence in the development of a more co-ordinated grant-making programme.

The motion from adopt the accounts was passed, as was the motion to re-elect Bob Holder as our independent examiner. Robin thanked Bob for his work on the 2024 accounts.

Carol Armstrong, our General Secretary, thanked her predecessor Sheila Wynn for all her support and guidance during this, her first year in the role. She also thanked the Executive Committee for their support, in particular in helping her deal with some of the more obscure

queries that she receives via the website. She thanked the Members' Weekend organisers for their efforts: Stephen Clarkson and Gareth Bursnall for their plant quizzes, Ken Southall for organising the photographic competition and Barbara Lewis for judging it, cake bakers for providing refreshments and Fred Rumsey for agreeing to be our speaker.

Janet John, our Meetings Secretary, outlined the challenges involved in organising the AGM and Members' Weekend each year: where to hold the event, the AGM venue, planning the field meetings and organising refreshments for the AGM itself. She thanked all those involved this year, in particular Simon Leach, Steve Little, Steve Parker and Helena Crouch for leading the weekend's field meetings.

Janet commended the 2025 meetings programme, which consisted of 50 days of field meetings, with locations as far north as Inverness and as far south as Jersey. She always aims to achieve a good spread of meetings throughout the British Isles, so that members have an event within easy reach (or are tempted by the prospect of an extended trip). In a departure from the norm, this year a meeting in the Engadine, Switzerland, was offered, courtesy of Lyn and Amanda Jones.

Also different from usual, three field meetings were held at the invitation of the landowner, with a request that we share our plant-lists with them. This was the case at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, Stinchcombe Hill,

Gloucestershire, and the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal Trust in Wiltshire.

Janet noted that, for the first time, a WFS meeting had had to be postponed this year due to intense heat and wondered if this might become a trend. She also thanked leaders who had stood in at very short notice when the intended leaders had had to withdraw: Ian Green for taking over the two-day Inverness meeting, Maureen Parry at the Great Orme and Mario Maculan for his assistance with the Woolwich Common meeting.

Regarding WFS online activities, Janet hailed the success of the Introduction to Botany Course, held by Zoom and delivered by Karen von Oostrum, targeting members in the early stages of their botanical journey. The course had received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

In conclusion, Janet thanked all field meeting leaders for their time, effort and knowledge-sharing, enabling members to learn about and enjoy our flora. She will soon be turning her attention to next year's programme and requested ideas about locations or offers to lead field meetings and/or online talks.

Helen Dignum, our Website Manager, reported that the WFS website continues to work well, with regular updates concerning our regulations, changes to Executive Committee members and Branch Secretaries, AGM information etc. Helen has now uploaded past issues of the WFS magazine from 2017 to

date, available on the website as pdfs. She hopes to use AI to create an index to make them more accessible.

The Stripe online membership payment system has experienced no glitches recently, with an upward trend in payments made that way. As of 20th August 2025, the WFS e-mail mailing list had 1,262 subscribers, comprising 733 members, 46 ex-members, 478 non-members and 5 of unknown status. WFS has sent out 17 email newsletters in the last twelve months, with about 70% of recipients opening each mail. The Membership Secretary adds all new members to the mailing list as they join and this list is periodically reviewed to remove non-members who do not open emails and check that new members have been subscribed.

Helen requested a volunteer to manage the WFS Instagram account, as she does not have time to do so. She is always keen to receive members' suggestions as to what they would like to see on the website and how the website can be kept useful and relevant.

Nichola Hawkins, our Publicity Secretary, advertised the wide range of materials she has available for members attending botanical events, including membership application leaflets, flyers, postcards, a display stand, posters, plant quizzes etc. Nichola might also be able to attend such events herself, as she had the now annual Botanical University Challenge. She reminded members about the WFS online shop, which

offers items such as T-shirts and tote-bags, while enamel badges and car stickers can be obtained from Membership Secretary, Sue Poyser.

Social Media: We have 1,044 followers on Instagram, 4,300 on Facebook, 2,924 on X, 640 YouTube subscribers and 42 followers on our new Bluesky page. Nichola requested suitable photos of plants and locations to upload to these and also photos of children with flowers to put on flyers aimed at the younger age group, though their faces should not be fully visible.

Ken Southall, our Editor, now on his tenth issue of the magazine since taking over the editorship, expressed particular thanks to proofreaders Sheila Wynn and Steve Little for their help in interpreting some of the more difficult material. He thanked all those who volunteer to write field meeting reports. These, along with photographs of the event, are invaluable in making the magazine an interesting read. Ken is very happy to continue in his role as editor.

In his role as our **Photographic Secretary**, Ken said that he'd received 82 photos, five down on last year's total, from 13 contributors, the same number as last year. He is always impressed by the variety of subjects and the different techniques that the photographers employ. He thanked Executive Committee member Barbara Lewis for doing the judging and commended her for doing a great job. Ken congratulated this year's winner of the Violet Schwerdt Trophy, Mary Ashworth, whose photograph appeared on the back cover of the Autumn magazine.

Proposed changes to the Society's Regulations and Activities:

Robin Blades outlined the proposed revision to the wording and tone of the *Recording* section of the *Regulations and Activities* to make it sound more up-to-date and less prescriptive. The two main substantial changes are:

- (i) Allowing individual members to choose whether to start a new list each year or to record cumulatively from the start;
- (ii) Allowing members to choose whether to record plants which are not in flower.

Robin hoped that the revised regulations would encourage members to learn by taking a more scientific approach to their diary entries i.e. by recording all the necessary elements expected of any biological record (what was seen, where, when and by whom). While there is no problem with the use of plant ID apps to point you in the right direction, Robin highlighted the need always to check the identification, not least in order to try and understand why something is what it is.

These changes were approved.

Re-election of Officers:

All officers were re-elected unopposed. However, Peter Llewellyn informed us that **our President, Sir Ghilleán Prance**, wishes to step down and has requested us to look for a replacement. Also, although this year no ordinary Executive Committee

members stood down, this time next year two people are scheduled to do so and Peter encouraged members to consider standing.

Any other business:

Priscilla Nobbs commended the Executive Committee on doing a great job. **Pauline Wilson** asked if information was available as to who receives WFS grants. Robin responded that these were summarised on page three of the accounts, while Helen Dignum pointed out that a list of the 2024 awards was available on the website.

Date and venue of next meeting:

The next AGM will be held on Saturday 5th September 2026 at the Community Centre, Station Road,

Hayling Island, Hampshire, PO11 0HB. The Branch Secretaries' meeting will be held by Zoom in the run-up to the AGM.

Post AGM:

The AGM was followed by a fascinating talk on the Continuing Discovery of our Native Flora, by Dr. Fred Rumsey, courtesy of which it became apparent that, even in these well-botanised isles, hitherto undetected species and new arrivals from the Continent continue to appear. To round off the afternoon, we had the traditional plant quizzes from Stephen Clarkson and Gareth Bursnall and the winning entries from the Photo Competition to admire. A small book sale raised £82 for Society funds.

WFS MEMBERS' WEEKEND FIELD MEETINGS:

SATURDAY 6th SEPTEMBER, ROUGHMOOR POND and LONGRUN MEADOW, TAUNTON.

On a nice, sunny morning, forty-eight of us congregated at Silk Mills Park and Ride, on the edge of Taunton. As there were so many of us, we split into three groups, Steve Little leading the one I was in. Unsurprisingly, it took some time to venture further than the car park as there were many species there to detain us, the first being Vervain *Verbena officinalis*, growing along the verge. Many more plants were growing on rough ground in the car park, including Hoary Mustard *Hirschfeldia incana*, Many-seeded Goosefoot *Lipandra*

polysperma and Grass-leaved Orache *Atriplex littoralis*. The latter's usual habitat is near the sea.

However, Steve suggested that it was probably brought here on car tyres.

Another goosefoot that generated some discussion was a possible candidate for Striped Goosefoot *Chenopodium strictum*. There was, however, one plant that generated some real excitement and that was the highly poisonous Thorn-apple *Datura stramonium*, with its spiny seed capsules, some of which were opening to spill its black seeds. We were told that it is a relative

Hybrid between Goats'-beard
and Salsify, see next page



newcomer to this area. Another plant new to the area, and probably also introduced on car tyres, is Wall Bedstraw *Galium parisiense*, which was growing between brick paving-stones. There was quite a bit of discussion about a sowthistle that was seen, possibly, it was thought, Slender Sowthistle *Sonchus tenerrimus*, an alien from the Mediterranean, but it was eventually decided that it probably wasn't, as John Poland thought that the inflorescence wasn't glandular enough. I can't imagine what other users of the Park and Ride thought of all of us scrabbling around the rough ground, some on their hands and knees!

We eventually moved on from the car park to a damp grassy area with planted trees along the boundary. It was here that John Poland pointed out Bay Willow *Salix pentandra* and apparently self-sown Hybrid Black-poplar *Populus x canadensis*, as well as the hybrid between Goat x Grey Willow *Salix caprea x cinerea* = *S. x reichardtii*. Apart from the trees, we also saw False Fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*, its stems having only slightly

winged angles, unlike the rare True Fox-sedge *C. vulpina*, which we did not see.

The path then led a short way through a lightly wooded area before coming to a pond, where there were some very large Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, identified by their fruits, some of which were handed round for us to examine. It is a plant which is rapidly declining. At the same pond, we were shown the hybrid between Bulrush and Lesser Bulrush *Typha latifolia x T. angustifolia* = *T. x glauca*, which generated some informative discussion.

Leaving the pond, we passed some oak trees whose leaves harboured a variety of interesting galls: Common Spangle *Neuroterus quercusbaccarum*, Silk-button *N. numismalis*, Artichoke *Andricus foecundatrix*, Marble *A. kollari* and Ram's-horn *A. aries*, all very different.

The path then crossed the River Tone, leading to Longrun Meadow, an area that was farmland prior to being made into a flood defence and public open space. At the edge of a small clump of trees, Wood Club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus* and the near-threatened Hoary Cinquefoil *Potentilla argentea* were pointed out to us, the latter certainly introduced to the site. Further along, on a small grassy embankment, Greek Dock *Rumex cristatus* was seen growing. On examining the fruits, we could see that the valves were slightly toothed.

In the meadow, Steve showed us the rayed form of Common Knapweed

Centaurea nigra ssp. *rivularis*, which generated a lot of discussion about whether or not it was that or Chalk Knapweed *C. debeauxii*. It was eventually confirmed to be the former by its rounded phyllaries and the very swollen stem below the head.

Near the end of the meeting and before returning to the car park, the three groups intermingled at a spot where the highlight of the morning was flowering. It was the hybrid between Goat's-beard and Salsify *Tragopogon pratensis* x *T. porrifolius*

= *T. x mirabilis*, a delightful, colourful little flower, which Nichola Hawkins was carefully guarding from being trampled.

It was an enjoyable and informative morning botanising and how lucky we were that after a very hot and dry summer there were still some flowers showing. Many thanks to Simon Leach, Steve Little and Stephen Parker and others for sharing their expertise.

SUE SKARSTEIN

SUNDAY 7th SEPTEMBER, SHAPWICK HEATH NNR and AVALON MARSHES. This was my first year (as a newbie!) attending the WFS AGM and Members' Weekend and I have to say, it was one of the best weekends that I had in 2025! What an incredible bunch of people, and to be surrounded by a massive wealth of knowledge and experience was very special.

Whilst the entire weekend was excellent, the highlight for me was the Avalon Marshes, on the Somerset

Levels. This was my first experience of such an important botanical site and of visiting peatlands.

That morning, we awoke to loud claps of thunder and several flashes of lightning and, needless to say, felt some trepidation as we packed our wet weather gear and other bits and pieces for the day out. Driving from Taunton to our destination, things slowly improved and our mood lifted when we entered the car park and saw a large gathering of WFS members in various huddles, no



Most of the group about to enjoy seeing the Avalon Marshes.

Sweet Track Walkway



doubt debating whether the weather would improve. And...improve it did!

Having had a briefing from our leaders, we set off, in my case not really knowing the delights that lay ahead. Oh boy! For a relative newcomer to the world of wild flowers, nothing could have prepared me for the sheer magnificence of Shapwick Heath. It was here for the first time that I really got some understanding of the importance of our peatlands and the part they play in our world. Seeing reed-beds, fens and woodland and trying to keep my balance on the prehistoric timber Sweet Track walkway (an ancient

trackway or causeway in the Somerset Levels, named by its finder in the 1970's, Ray Sweet,) was a marvellous experience.

Likewise, the spotting of many plants, including grasses, sedges and ferns, was sheer joy. Needless to say, I was totally reliant on all the wonderfully helpful members of the WFS, who identified them and then patiently answered all my questions regarding particular species.

My thanks go to all of those whom I met on the walk and, in particular, our great walk leaders and staff from the Avalon Marshes Nature Reserve. Special thanks go to one individual, who very kindly lent me his notes afterwards for me to transcribe into an excel spreadsheet to further my studies. My heart still sings when I look at this long list. Singling out particular plants, I would have to say that seeing Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata* and Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina* for the first time was very special. All I have to do now is to gain a clear understanding of the workings of these habitats and return next year to identify them all over again - I'm hooked!

NOELIN MALLATRATT

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION ORGANISER'S REPORT

I'm grateful to WFS Committee member Barbara Lewis, who this year judged the competition, not an easy job, especially when there were two virtually identical pictures of Shining Crane's-bill *Geranium lucidum* in Class 3 (Close-up). Luckily, the entrant who wasn't

selected for a place, accepted the decision with grace. Once again, the overall quality of the entries was extremely good. The winner of the Violet Schwerdt Trophy, with her excellent picture of Hazel *Corylus avellana* with male and female flowers, was Mary Ashworth. Her

picture was shown on the back cover of this year's Autumn magazine. Congratulations Mary. I was very pleased to have received 82 entries from thirteen entrants but would be happy to receive even more

for next year's competition. Each year, I print on A4 proper photographic paper, the winning entries in each class and display them on easels at the AGM.

KEN SOUTHALL

Class 1: Habitat

1 st	Mary Ashworth	Sea Pink <i>Armeria maritima</i>
2 nd	David Caals	Yellow Horned-poppy <i>Glaucium flavum</i>
3 rd	Moirra Smith	Sea Pea <i>Lathyrus japonicus</i>
H/C	Moirra Smith	Green-winged Orchid <i>Anacamptis morio</i>

Class 2: Plant Portrait

1 st	Lyn Jones	Seaside Centaury <i>Centaureum littorale</i>
2 nd	Melvin Smith	Grass-of-Parnassus <i>Parnassia palustris</i>
3 rd	Andy Skarstein	Cretan Tulip <i>Tulipa cretica</i>
H/C	Moirra Smith	Subterranean Clover <i>Trifolium subterraneum</i>

Class 3: Close-up

1 st	Mary Ashworth	Hazel <i>Corylus avellana</i>
2 nd	Moirra Smith	Shining Crane's-bill <i>Geranium lucidum</i>
3 rd	Paul Clarke	Bee Orchid <i>Ophrys apifera</i>
H/C	Moirra Smith	Fairy Flax <i>Linum catharticum</i>

Class 4: Foreign Fields

1 st	Sheila Wynn	Alpenrose <i>Rhododendron ferrugineum</i>
2 nd	Dave Morgan	Long-flowered Thyme <i>Thymus longiflorus</i>
3 rd	Moirra Smith	Fountain-grass <i>Pennisetum setaceum</i>
H/C	Richard Coomber	Ana-tree <i>Faidherbia albida</i>

Class 5: Human Element

1 st	Sue Southall	'This plant had better be worth it!'
2 nd	Amanda Jones	Lunch Break
3 rd	Sue Southall	'The Gall of it'
H/C	Sue Southall	At the end of the day

All of the above winning entries can be viewed on the Members' Page of our website.

1,2,3,4 and 5-day MEETINGS

WEETING HEATH, NORFOLK, 30th MARCH

Fifteen of us met on a bright and windy day, early in the season, to look for some of the Breckland speciality plants. We were met by the local Wildlife Trust warden, James Symonds, who gave us an overview of how the field that we were about to visit is being managed specifically for the rare Breckland plants that grow there.

Stephen Clarkson then provided some historical background to the area, explaining that 'Breck' comes from the mediaeval practice of breaking up the land for cultivation. The Brecks, which cover approximately 400 square miles in Norfolk and south Suffolk, were originally heathland created by prehistoric farmers and their grazing animals. Rotational farming, involving ploughing, was carried out every ten years or so. The typical tree was Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, which was grown in straight lines called 'deal rows' to mark boundaries.

Breckland is one of the driest areas in England, with the village of Santon Downham recording both the highest and lowest temperatures: up to 39°C and down to -9.7°C. It is a very sandy habitat and from 1665-1670 the 'Great Sand Flood' inundated the area. One farmer had furze hedges and ramparts some sixty feet in height to protect his property.

The Normans introduced rabbits, known as coneys, in the 1270's, though the peak of rabbit production wasn't until the 19th century, when the

warreners who managed them lived in flint houses. Rabbits were classed as high-class luxury items and an annual cull reached over 20,000 animals. Since 1953, the rabbit population has collapsed due to myxomatosis and, since the 1990's, rabbit haemorrhagic disease.

Over 12,500 species occur in Breckland, including Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Woodlark *Lullula arborea*, Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus*, Wormwood Moonshiner Beetle *Amara fusca*, Grey Carpet Moth *Lithostegia griseata*, Spanish Catchfly *Silene otites*, Tower Mustard *Turritis glabra*, Field Wormwood *Artemisia campestris*, Proliferous Pink *Petrorhagia prolifera* and three speciality speedwell species.

It was these three rare speedwells, all annuals of sandy soils, that were the focus of this meeting. However, before leaving the car park, we were shown some translocated Field Wormwood *Artemisia campestris* plants, though it was too early in the season for them to be flowering.

With skylarks singing, we set off to the field and it wasn't long before we came across hundreds, if not thousands, of plants of Breckland Speedwell *Veronica praecox* - a species considered a neophyte in Britain, first recorded in the wild in 1933. Helpfully, to aid comparison, growing beside it in places was Fingered Speedwell *V. triphyllos*, both in flower. Whilst they have



similar blue flowers, one of the main differences is in their leaves, with *V. praecox* having serrate leaves, whilst those of *V. triphyllos* are deeply lobed, hence its common name Fingered Speedwell. The latter is critically endangered and legally protected from being picked or uprooted.

After some further searching, we found a few plants of the endangered Spring Speedwell *V. verna*, but we were too early for flowers. It is a smaller plant than the other two, the stems have adpressed hairs and, when in fruit, the bracts are much longer than the fruiting pedicel. The identification of these speedwells was assisted by one of the group, Peter Leonard, bringing along and sharing some identification sheets he

had created by pulling together ID characters from various plant identification books.

In the same field, we also found Annual Knawel *Scleranthus annuus*, Corn Spurrey *Spergularia arvensis*, the leaves of Sand Catchfly *Silene conica* and, nearby, in an adjacent field, Rare Spring-sedge *Carex ericetorum*, with the single male spike sufficiently developed to show the distinctive purplish-brown glumes.

After lunch, nine of the group continued to Ramparts Field, an area unfortunately suffering from lack of management, though we were able to see flowering Shepherd's Cress *Teesdalia nudicaulis*, Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*, Bulbous Meadow-grass *Poa bulbosa*, Early Forget-me-not *Myosotis ramosissima*, and Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*, plus the leaves of Blue Fescue *Festuca longifolia*, Russian Cinquefoil *Potentilla intermedia* and Breckland Thyme *Thymus serpyllum*.

It was a very enjoyable day and a huge thank you to James, the warden, who gave up part of his morning, on Mother's Day, to meet us, and to Stephen for leading the meeting.

LAURA GRAVESTOCK
AND STEPHEN CLARKSON

WYE NNR and HOTHFIELD SSSI, KENT, 6th JUNE

Wye NNR: This was truly a day of two halves, ably led by Heather Silk, on two reserves near Ashford that she knew well and where there was

plenty of interest. The Wye NNR, in the morning, was mostly on a chalk hillside and the eight of us had to endure intermittent showers,



Bladder Campion

Hedge Woundwort *Stachys sylvatica*,
Hedge Bedstraw *Galium album*,
Bladder Campion *Silene vulgaris*,
Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*,
Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*
and Crosswort *Cruciata laevis*.

although they only became heavy towards the end. This was only my third day out with the WFS and I'm a near beginner, so the following notes will be fairly non-technical!

This reserve is cared for by Natural England and has splendid views down towards Romney Marsh and the coast. It apparently supports a range of orchids at different times, but the dry spring meant that only a few were on view: Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (lots!), Chalk Fragrant-orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*.

Other familiar and not-so-familiar flowers, some with contrasting specimens of the same genus, included Tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum* and Hairy St. John's-wort *H. hirsutum*; Smooth Hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris* and Rough Hawk's-beard *C. biennis*; and Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys* and Common Field-speedwell *V. persica*. Examples of non-paired plants were Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale*,

Hothfield SSSI: By contrast, for our afternoon visit, Hothfield contains Kent's last bogland and one of its few remnants of open heath - and the weather smiled sunnily on us five remaining visitors. As are many of our favourite places for wild flowers, this site is protected as an SSSI and is looked after by the volunteers of the Kent Wildlife Trust - and by a herd of highland cattle, ensuring that it's not taken over by excess scrub, which would turn the site into woodland, a less rare habitat.

In its bogland state, we were able to see various typical flowers, for example Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, Bog-myrtle



Bog Asphodel

Myrica gale, Bog Asphodel
Narthecium ossifragum, Marsh

Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Marsh St. John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*. The more expert among us were also looking at sedges and grasses; I had heard about Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*, Remote Sedge *C. remota* and various other members of the *Carex* genus which I shall leave unnamed on this occasion. I was reminded that Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* is also a sedge.

The drier heathland areas provided more orchids: Heath Spotted-orchid

Dactylorhiza maculata and Common Spotted-orchid - plenty of each. But there were many other plants to admire, for example Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis*, Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*, swathes of Ragged-Robin *Silene flos-cuculi*, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, and Changing Forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor* etc.

All in all, a splendid and instructive day. Many thanks, Heather!

PAUL CHAMBERLAIN

STINCHCOMBE HILL, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, 23rd JUNE

After a run of rather hot weather, we were glad to have a cool day for the Stinchcombe Hill field meeting. Coffee and cake in the Golf Clubhouse was a wonderful start to the day. We ate and drank while listening to a presentation from Kathy Meakin of Evidence Nature about the Stinchcombe Hill Project. A baseline survey of the whole SSSI grassland has been done using a select list of limestone grassland indicator species. The aim of the meeting was to help Kathy expand on what was missing from the indicator list for a part of the SSSI.

After the introduction, we went out to find the plants on her 'list'. When we found one, we stopped and noted the other plants in the close vicinity and grid referenced the spot. Lunch was taken high up on the hill, with good views down into the valley, after which we dissolved the meeting and

people went their separate ways for a walk around the hillside. Four of us, plus Kathy, went on locating plants as we walked, things like Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* and Squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*.



It was different from the average WFS field meeting but nonetheless much enjoyed. Perhaps there may be other groups and locations where baseline surveys are needed and WFS members are in a unique position to be able to provide such a service.

PAULINE WILSON

NEW FOREST, HAMPSHIRE, and EAST DORSET, 28th - 29th JUNE

Day 1: The first challenge of the meeting was parking amongst the New Forest ponies seeking shade in the Beaulieu station enclosure car park. Nick Aston greeted us and led us along a path towards Shatterford Bottom. Our first treat was to see swathes of Coral-necklace *Illecebrum verticillatum* across the bottom of

Lycopodiella inundata, a rare and ancient species related to ferns, dating from the time of the dinosaurs. White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba* was growing plentifully, its white flowers adorning the tips of the plants in many tufts. Nick was delighted to see its much rarer relative, Brown Beak-sedge *R. fusca*, also present, not previously recorded at this site. Brown Beak-sedge flowers are brown (!), in a fewer-flowered inflorescence. The group enjoyed finding a variety of bog plants, including Lesser Bladderwort *Utricularia minor*, Bog Pimpernel *Lysimachia tenella* and Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor*. Returning to the car park for lunch, we appreciated a fragrant patch of Chamomile *Chamaemelum nobile* in the closely-grazed land next to it.

We then drove in convoy to the western end of Hatchet Pond, a mecca for interesting plants. We changed into wellies for an exploration of the boggiest area, passing a stand of Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* in a sheltered ditch. There was a lovely array of bog plants, including plentiful Marsh St. John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, which has the typical yellow flowers of but very different leaves from other St. John's-worts. The pale pink Bog Pimpernel was just the same colour as the occasional Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*. Paul Hughes finally spotted a single pale green spike of Bog Orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* only a few centimetres high, in its typical habitat amongst



Inspecting Coral Necklace. Photo: Helen Dignum

drying tracks. Another tiny plant was Heath Pearlwort *Sagina subulata*. Shatterford Bottom itself is a very deep bog which never dries out, but has a path running along its edge, allowing convenient botanical inspection.

Nick pointed out Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and the first sprouts of Marsh Clubmoss

Sphagnum in bogs with some flow of water.

For the final part of our day we explored more of the margins of Hatchet Pond. Interesting plants included Shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* and Small-fruited Yellow-Sedge *Carex viridula*, which was extremely low-growing, with almost no stalk above the basal rosette and no gaps between the clusters of flowers on the stalk, unlike Common Yellow-Sedge *C. demissa*, which has spaces between the flower clusters. The rare Hampshire-purslane *Ludwigia palustris* was growing in the pond. It is in the willowherb family and you could see the family similarity.

We finished on our hands and knees looking for Chaffweed *Lysimachia minima* in a grazed area and also saw Lesser Centaury *Centaureum pulchellum*. We spotted the three pale pink petals of Lesser Water-Plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*, which has near threatened status. Our final plant was Pillwort *Pilularia globulifera*, an unusual fern with simple straight fronds rising vertically from a horizontal creeping rhizome. The round pills along the rhizome are its fruiting bodies.

This was an excellent day, seeing some real New Forest treasures, despite the botanical difficulties caused by the unusually hot and dry weather in the spring.

HELEN DIGNUM

Day 2: We gathered at the Minstead Road car park between Lyndhurst and Cadnam for what was the start of

another scorching day. Nick Aston guided us towards the main road to see the very rare Bowman's Horsetail *Equisetum x bowmanii*, the hybrid between Wood Horsetail *E. sylvaticum* and Great Horsetail *E. telmateia*. Bowman's Horsetail, named after the late Paul Bowman (former Vice-county Recorder for South Hampshire), who found it in 1986, has made its home on this road verge. Many of us agreed that it was dainty in appearance and rather attractive for a horsetail. Close by, we found Zigzag Clover *Trifolium medium* hiding under some Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Moving on, we examined a nearby damp New Forest 'lawn', which produced Bog Pimpernel *Lysimachia tenella* intermingled with the white flowers of Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata*. Yet again, the short turf emitted the familiar fragrance of Chamomile *Chamaemelum nobile*, the more we trampled on it, before we returned to the cars.

A drive along the A31 and some of the narrow New Forest roads brought us to our next location, Smugglers Road car park. Our aim was to explore the fringes of Vales Moor, part of a deep and extensive New Forest valley mire. Approaching the boggy flushes along a dry heathland track, we found some annuals typical of this habitat, including Small Cudweed *Logfia minima* and the tiny Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus* displaying its characteristic bird's-claw-shaped seed pods. As Nick pointed out, one benefit of this year's hot weather was that we could venture further into Vales Moor, whereas in a normal year, this would

be a risky business requiring waterproof footwear. So, with many of the members wearing ankle boots and trainers standing on the edge of a boggy flush, Nick pointed out the different leaf shapes of Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, Oblong-leaved Sundew *D. intermedia* and Great Sundew *D. anglica*. In addition, we were able to see the hybrid



between Great and Round-leaved Sundews, *D. x obovata*, noting its hybrid vigour and larger leaf size.

Our final site visit was Ashley Heath, just across the border in east Dorset. Whilst waiting for a 'wayward' member (the author) to arrive, a

patient group explored the now 'famous' botanical site of Burton Close, where, much to their surprise, kerbside weeds included Sharp-leaved Fluellen *Kickxia elatine* and Small-flowered Crane's-bill *Geranium pusillum*. A short walk along a disused railway line brought us to the entrance of a boggy heath, where we saw Fragrant Agrimony *Agrimonia procera*, which we duly keyed out as such. Further along, we came to our first *Vaccinium*, Highbush Blueberry *V. corymbosum*. This medium-sized shrub, probably introduced by birds, was dotted across the heath with ripening fruit. Our second was American Cranberry *V. macrocarpon* in flower, another introduced plant that is more robust than Cranberry *V. oxycoccos* and has larger, white-pink downturned flowers. Nearby, in the wettest parts of the heath, were sundews and large stands of the rare Brown Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca*.

I think I can speak for all the group in appreciation of the dedication shown by Nick and Carol Hawkins during the extremely challenging weather conditions. The droughted and botanically impoverished nature of the locations on the original itinerary for the day meant that a new programme had to be organised during the week before the meeting took place.

PAUL HUGHES

PONTRESINA, UPPER ENGADINE VALLEY, SWITZERLAND, 1st – 5th JULY



Botanists above St. Moritz. Photo by Amanda Jones.



Photo: Anne Kell

Betony-leaved Rampion

Day 1: Alp Languard, Pontresina:

We'd arrived! A party of 12 WFS members, ably led by Lyn Jones, gathered at the foot of the chairlift in Pontresina, to be raised to the lofty heights of 2,325m on Alp Languard and our first encounter with the Swiss alpine meadows. This was a gentle introduction, with a slow amble away from the chairlift and its restaurant, across the beautiful slopes bathed in flowers. As is usual with WFS meetings, we didn't cover a lot of ground but were soon amassing a long list of what, for many of us, were totally new plants. I've always had a love of quirky flowers and the highlights for me were the rampions *Phyteuma* spp., with their spiky hairdos. Here we found Betony-leaved *Phyteuma betonicifolium*, Globe-headed *P. hemisphaericum*



Martagon Lily *Lilium martagon* and Aconite-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus aconitifolius*. A superb first day.

ANNE KELL

Day 2: Corviglia to St. Moritz: We began with a bus ride to St. Moritz followed by the two-stage funicular railway up to Corviglia (2,486m), from where we enjoyed the fabulous views down over St. Moritz and its lake.

and Round-headed *P. orbiculare*. It is easy to pick out the big and bold but we mustn't forget that small is also beautiful and the brilliant blue gentians were gleaming in the sunshine, notably Alpine Gentian *Gentiana nivalis* and Bavarian Gentian *G. bavarica*.

We were so deeply absorbed in our plant identification that Lyn managed to misplace his mobile phone and glasses at different points in the trip, necessitating a quick search party. The phone was handily located next to a Lesser Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera bifolia* that we'd seen earlier. After lunch, overlooking the stunning mountains beyond, some of the party caught the chairlift down while others headed down off the slopes and through the pinewoods below. Here we saw the beautiful



The cable car up to the summit of Piz Nair (3,057m) was not operating but there was more than enough to see as we spent the day walking at botanical speed back down the mountain. Our route often ran parallel to the gravity-defying downhill mountain bike trail and caution was needed as we crossed over it several times. There were so many flowers to look at that it was difficult to know where to start and it would have been possible to spend all day within a 10-minute radius of the funicular station. Everyone enjoyed seeing the pin-up of alpine plants - Edelweiss *Leontopodium nivale* ssp. *alpinum*; I later spotted commercially-grown Edelweiss for sale in the florist's in Pontresina and it is also grown for use in anti-ageing cosmetics.

The intense blue gentians were one of the highlights of the trip for me. We saw both Trumpet Gentian *Gentiana acaulis* and Clusius's Gentian *G. clusii*, Lyn explaining the differences, including the length and shape of the calyx teeth and the colour inside the petals. Most of the walking was easy, with just one short section that involved a little more care and, for me, a less dignified, closer to the ground, method of descent. However, I was rewarded with our first sight of the distinctive violet and orange of Alpine Toadflax *Linaria alpina*, albeit a rather small specimen. Lunchtime entertainment was provided by a group of Nutcrackers flying over the nearby treetops and the occasional appearance of a marmot. Amongst the orchids present were many Chalk

Fragrant-orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea*, displaying a range of colours from white to deep pink. A White False-helleborine *Veratrum album* generated interest, then a little further down a few more were spotted, followed shortly afterwards by a whole hillside covered in them. This was a fairly typical sequence of how we encountered different species over the five days. Just outside the half-way funicular station there is a broad, accessible path known as Heidi's Blumenweg, where examples of the local flowers are cultivated in labelled beds for all to enjoy and this is the path we followed as we made our way back down into St. Mortiz after a second day of superb botanising.

LOUISE BREALEY

Day 3: Corvatsch to Fuorcla

Surlej: The day could have started really badly. My husband Gwyndaf and I missed the bus to Silvaplana by seconds. However, the day was saved. Gwyndaf madly flagged down the bus. It stopped. Doors opened. On we stepped to ringing applause from the whole bus! Embarrassing, but a happy relief!

After two bus rides, there were two funicular journeys to get to the snow peaks, starting at Corvatsch Talstation Surlej. The main interest at the top, Corvatsch Bergstation (3,303m), was the stunning view of the mountain peaks and glaciers. Seeing some of the group on their hands and knees peering at cracks in the concrete at the viewing station must have seemed bewildering to



non-botanists! A descent to Corvatsch Mittelstation Murtel (2,702m) led to our main botanising



of the day. It is difficult to give a feel of the quantity and vibrant quality of the plants that we came across. There was no need to seek them out - they littered the sides of the paths. Striking colours and shapes, they included Alpine Toadflax, a gorgeous purple and orange, the yellow stars of Musky Saxifrage *Saxifraga exarata* ssp. *moschata*, the wonderful shiny white and yellow of Glacier Crowfoot *Ranunculus glacialis*, the deep blue of Trumpet Gentian and the whimsically-shaped little Alpine Snowbell *Soldanella alpina*. So much to see, discuss, record and enjoy.

Our lunch spot was to die for! The view of mountains and glaciers at Fuorcla Surlej (2,754m) was stunning. However, conveniently when we had finished eating, a downpour drove us back to the Mittelstation, followed, for most of us, by a quick descent on the funicular and a bus back to Pontresina. Some hardy souls made their descent on foot. A satisfying and enjoyable day.

JANET JOHN

Day 4: Diavolezza and Val da Fain:

We took the morning bus from Pontresina to the Bernina Diavolezza station and then the cable car up to Diavolezza, at 2,978m. To the south, we had amazing views of snow-covered peaks and the Pers Glacier. On the gravel and rocks around the upper station, we found Alpine Moon-daisy *Leucanthemopsis alpina*, Grey Alpine-groundsels *Jacobaea incana*, Musky Saxifrage and beautiful clumps of Glacier Crowfoot. We explored a short distance along the ridge, treading carefully on the rocks

to find the showy purple flowers of Viscid Primrose *Primula latifolia* and Hairy Primrose *P. hirsuta*. Emerging from crevices were specialties such as Rosette-leaved Rampion *Phyteuma globulariifolium* and Kerner's Lousewort *Pedicularis kernerii*.

We returned by cable car to the lower station and made our way across the road to explore Val da Fain, a valley below Piz Alv. At the start of the path, Large Pink *Dianthus superbus* stood out and at ground level, a cluster of the small flowers of Alpine Gentian. We carried on past wet meadows full of flowers, with numerous Broad-leaved Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis* and Tofield's Asphodel *Tofieldia calyculata*. In the flushes close to the path were Yellow Saxifrage *Saxifraga aizoides* and Starry Saxifrage *Micranthes stellaris*. In the drier meadows were large numbers of vanilla-orchids *Gymnadenia (Nigritella) rhellicani* and *G. nigra*. We were hopeful of seeing False Orchid *Chamorchis alpina* and Lyn continued to search for us, but without success. Instead, we found many Frog Orchids *Coeloglossum viride* and Small-white Orchids *Pseudorchis albida*.

Butterflies such as Purple-edged Copper, Alpine Ringlet and Mazarine Blue took to the air as we walked through the stunning meadows with a multitude of flowers, including various bellflowers, Betony-leaved Rampion, Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* and Bladder Campion *Silene vulgaris*. In the short grass, Moonwort *Botrychium lunaria* was widespread. The blue of bellflowers was



Photo: Sheila Wynn

everywhere, allowing us to compare Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia* with Fairy's-thimble *Campanula cochleariifolia*. Eventually we came to a wooden bridge with missing planks, where we opted to turn back. On our return route, we found basking Alpine Grayling, Mountain Clouded Yellow and Alpine Grizzled Skipper butterflies and, alongside the path, Cobweb Houseleek *Sempervivum arachnoideum*, Alpine Gypsophila *Gypsophila repens*, Livelong Saxifrage *Saxifraga paniculata* and a few Edelweiss *Leontopodium alpinum*.

We finished another superb botanical day with a return trip by bus to Pontresina, where we were shown, by the side of a house on the main street, fruiting Strawberry-blite *Blitum capitatum*.

DINESH PATEL

Day 5: Alp Muottas to Lej Muragl:

For our last day, we took the funicular to Muottas Muragl, at 2,456m. As we climbed up the path towards Lej (Lake) Muragl, the clouds swept in and, as the weather had turned decidedly chillier, woolly hats and

gloves were much in evidence. It was a good opportunity to reinforce what we'd learnt earlier as we encountered many of the plants we'd already seen: the pink-flowered umbellifer Alpine Lovage *Mutellina purpurea*, the lovely little Blunt-leaved Rock-jasmine *Androsace obtusifolia* and Arnica *Arnica montana*, to name just a few. There were also new delights to be seen along the way. By the path were Jacquin's Rush *Juncus jacquinii*, with its amazing pink, corkscrew stigmas protruding from the flowers, and the large, white flowers of Whitish Hawkweed *Schlagintweitia (Hieracium) intybacea*, as well as Parsley Fern *Cryptogramma crispa* and Alpine Lady-fern *Athyrium distentifolium* hidden amongst the boulders.

After lunch, as we started our walk back from the lake, the sun returned and we saw carpets of Alpine Avens *Geum montanum*, the wonderfully named Flesh-pink Lousewort *Pedicularis rostratospicata* and a single flower of Glacier Mouse-ear *Cerastium uniflorum*. We enjoyed our final views of gentians, snowbells and saxifrages.

It was the end of our five wonderful days in this botanical paradise. We'd been guided around this beautiful area by Amanda and Lyn, whose expertise and knowledge of the area and the flora made it such a rewarding experience. Our grateful thanks go to them both.

SHEILA WYNN

EASTBOURNE, EAST SUSSEX, 12th JULY

Under a hot sun and with few clouds in the sky, we assembled at the Holywell Tea Chalet. Eastbourne seafront and its environs have a remarkable flora, comprising natives, aliens and adventives, as documented in articles written by Matthew Berry that have been published in the WFS magazine and *BSBI News* over the years. With that in mind, Gareth Bursnall and Priscilla Nobbs undertook the endeavour of introducing us to some of these aspects of Eastbourne's flora, which began around the Tea Chalet. Here, Russian Sage *Salvia yangii* (syn. *Perovskia atriplicifolia*) showed signs of seeding freely in and among the masonry. Walking along the seafront, we soon encountered Silver Ragwort *Jacobaea maritima*, Shrubby Orache *Atriplex halimus* and Spanish Broom *Spartium junceum*, all of which were

colonising the shrubby banks. On the paved promenade, Annual Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis muralis* was found in flower. Equally at home on the shingle beach were splendid specimens of Sea Kale *Crambe maritima* and Yellow Horned-poppay *Glaucium flavum*. Those of us particularly interested in alien plants and casuals, we were rewarded by the sight of Kangaroo-apple *Solanum laciniatum* growing in the shingle. On the landward side of the seafront, the flower borders were duly admired as they looked a riot of colour; crucially, they contained plants that we would observe later as colonists of the shingle beach.

During lunch we pondered whether some Peruvian Lily *Alstroemeria aurea* plants qualified as legitimate records, as new plants had spread to



Many of us were impressed with a single Cape-gooseberry *Physalis peruviana* that was flowering and fruiting in the shingle. Equally arresting was Chupalla (or Panicked Eryngo) *Eryngium paniculatum*, growing well out of reach from a fissure in a retaining wall. As we approached the pier, other plants were observed growing happily in the shingle, such as

the edge of the flower border within which they had been planted. Certainly, these plants showed promising signs of making an escape, but by no means a great escape. Personally, I'm very uncomfortable about recording these plants, whether as a WFS diary entry or vice-country record. Discussion ensued about the challenges of determining when a garden plant is genuinely naturalised, one significant influencing factor being, amongst others, location - its capacity to traverse demarcated boundaries and regenerate. There was no ambiguity about the naturalised status of those plants that had escaped the confines of the flower borders and were regenerating, sometimes profusely, along the edge of the shingle beach. We were delighted to find colourful examples of these space invaders that included Yellow Sea-aster (or Gold Coin Daisy) *Pallenis maritima* (syn. *Asteriscus maritimus*), Eastern Cat-mint *Nepeta racemosa* and Olympic St. John's-wort *Hypericum olympicum*.

Corsican Hellebore *Helleborus argutifolius*, Sweet Scabious *Scabiosa atropurpurea*, African Lily *Agapanthus praecox*, Sicilian Chamomile *Anthemis punctata*, Garden Tree-mallow *Malva x clementii*, Fern-leaf Yarrow *Achillea filipendulina* and Treasureflower *Gazania rigens*. In addition, Blue Cupidone *Catananche caerulea* was self-seeding on the seafront grass bank and walls. As we reached the pier, the meeting concluded with ice creams and departures. Some of us ventured further into the streets of Eastbourne to inspect the urban flora, of which Common Purslane *Portulaca oleracea* was a notable pavement weed.

Enormous thanks are due to Gareth and Priscilla for organising and leading such an interesting meeting, that was as memorable for its diverse flora as it was for the sunshine and stimulating company.

NICK ASTON

HOLY ISLAND OF LINDISFARNE, NORTHUMBERLAND, 14th and 15th JULY

Joint meeting between the Wild Flower Society
and Natural History Society of Northumbria

Day 1: About two dozen of us met at the car park at The Snook on Holy Island. We divided into two groups, with one group heading into the village, from where we walked to an area of sandy dunes called The Links, and the other group staying to explore the coast and dunes around The Snook. We swapped round the next day. Janet John asked me to write a report for the first day, led by James Common, joint Vice-county Recorder, with co-leader, Chris Metherell, for North Northumberland, but I would like to express my great appreciation for both leaders. (On the second day, Chris showed us Flea Sedge *Carex pulicaris*, and the way it 'behaves', which made me exclaim that he had convinced me that sedges could be interesting!)

The group to which I was assigned parked just outside the village (which can get extremely busy), sheltering briefly from the rain, and then walked through the village and beyond. Some of the first plants we saw were Dwarf Mallow *Malva neglecta*, which is apparently uncommon in Northumberland, followed by Tree Mallow *M. arborea*, and Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis*, with its pretty pink-and-white-striped flowers. We were shown how Welled Thistle *Carduus crispus* (with round heads) can be distinguished from Slender Thistle *C. tenuiflorus* (with narrow heads).

While walking along a country track, we also learned to distinguish Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare* (with hairs on the new-growth stems, and narrower leaves) from the garden variety. We saw Red Bartsia *Odontites vernus* (for which I have always had a bit of a soft spot, since keying it out on my own years ago, having initially assumed it must be a member of the Dead-nettle family). Other notable finds (for me at least) were Viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare* (such a great name for such a distinctive plant!), Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum*



Welled Thistle

officinale (which I had identified myself, for the first time, just a couple of weeks previously, a few miles further south along the coast), Quaking-grass *Briza media* (such a graceful plant!), and the dreaded Pirri-pirri-bur *Acaena novae-zelandiae*, introduced from Australia, which is now invasive on Lindisfarne.

Once we arrived at The Links, I learned that a dune slack is the wet depression between dunes. We saw, among many other plants of interest, the dune form of Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum* var. *maritimum*, Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, the wonderful Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride* (another great name!), Small Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum azoricum* and Common Twayblade *Neottia ovata*. New for me were Brookweed *Samolus valerandi* and Knotted Pearlwort *Sagina nodosa*. And of equal interest were Seaside Centaury *Centaureum littorale*, with its 'neon' pink flowers, and Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyl vulgaris* (a member of the carrot family, though how would you know, if you didn't already know?). The latter helped me to identify Floating Pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* a few weeks later.

After lunch, we spotted the very pretty Garden Tiger Moth. We were also pleased to see Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, Blue Fleabane *Erigeron acris* (small, but exquisite in its own way), Bog Pimpernel *Lysimachia tenella* (ditto), and Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*. Towards the end of the afternoon it started to rain, and we

were given the choice of calling it a day, or visiting the area around the harbour. On the basis of 'better to botanise than not to botanise', we all kept going, and were glad to have done so, not least after seeing a single specimen of Henbane *Hyoscyamus niger*, which is rare in this part of the world.

By the time I got home I was both exhilarated and exhausted. It had been great to identify so many plants, and spend so much time in the open air, in the company of other enthusiasts, all of whom were equally happy to share their expertise and learn from each other, without any sense of 'botanically more knowledgeable than thou'. And the second day of this two-day field trip was just as good as the first!

ROBERT KELSEY

Day 2: The group met leaders Chris and Hazel Metherell, authors of '*Plants of Holy Island*', and James Common, at the Snook. The group split into two, with James and his group leaving to botanise starting at the village, while the rest of us started to walk across a saltmarsh with Chris and Hazel. Our first plant was Hard-grass *Parapholis strigosa*. Close by were both Sea Arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima* and Marsh Arrowgrass *T. palustris*, enabling us to closely examine their differences. A well-known and attractive sedge is Long-bracted Sedge *Carex extensa*, which was quickly found, together with Distant Sedge *C. distans*. We then started to see a good range of salt-tolerant plants: Grass-leaved Orache *Atriplex littoralis*, Annual Sea-

blite *Suaeda maritima*, Greater Sea-Spurrey *Spergularia media* and a very large patch of the hybrid Sea x Sand Couch *Elymus athericus* x *E. junceiformis* = *E. x obtusiusculus*.

We crossed the busy road from the causeway onto the main saltmarsh, which is daily inundated by the sea. Here were Common Scurvygrass *Cochlearia officinalis*, Sea-purslane *Atriplex portulacoides* and Sea Aster *Tripolium pannonicum*, all in flower. A fairly dominant plant was Common Cord-grass *Spartina anglica*, a saltmarsh stabiliser which originated in about 1890 as a fertile hybrid between the native Small Cord-grass *S. maritima* and the North American Smooth Cord-grass *S. alterniflora* and which is now much commoner than either parent, dominating much of our coastline.

We then re-crossed the road and soon found Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris* in reasonable numbers. Chris said this was a very much reduced population from the thousands previously present, for reasons not fully understood. Chris then showed us the hybrid Grey x Eared Willow *Salix cinerea* x *S. aurita* = *S. multinervis*. There were several sedges, with Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris* being the most attractive, while Western Eyebright *Euphrasia tetraquetra* was abundant. We soon found other exciting plants: Brookweed *Samolus valerandi* and the uncommon Parsley Water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii*.



Parsley Water-dropwort

Eventually we came to a dry, cracked area and a cage. Last year, Rita and I found a large shallow lake here, with Marsh Helleborine and Northern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza purpurella*. The cage contained a few leaves of Round-leaved Wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia*. Apparently this has never flowered, but more plants have now been found in a different part of Holy Island, another botanical mystery. Here, we also found Saltmarsh Rush *Juncus gerardii* and the tiny flowers of Purple Milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus*. In a dried-up area were Small-fruited Yellow-sedge *Carex viridula*, Few-flowered Spike-rush *Eleocharis quinqueflora* and, best of all, two plants of Shoreweed *Littorella uniflora*, found by Hazel. We then continued our walk with some masterclasses in identification by Chris. We saw plenty of Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans*, which unfortunately has crowded out a good area of Early Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza incarnata*.

Most of the Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* were virtually over but Chris did find a good specimen of their hybrid with

flowers. On the path was much Flat-sedge *Blysmus compressus* and, in a marshy area, Grey Club-rush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* and Sea Club-rush

Bolboschoenus maritimus.

On the other side of the track was the highly-sought-after Lindisfarne Helleborine *Epipactis sancta*, of which there were seven in flower, including one in a cage.

On the way back to the car park there were two good flowering clumps of Seaside Centaury *Centaureum littorale*, which is the dominant centaury on the island. When we reached the car park, Chris asked if anyone wanted to see Scots Lovage *Ligusticum scoticum*, which most of us did. As some of the group were leaving, we gave a warm and profusely grateful vote of thanks to Chris and Hazel. The group had all enjoyed a fabulous day and learned a great deal. Having duly seen the Scots Lovage, we

returned to the cars in a final rainstorm.

For any member wishing to visit Holy Island, '*Plants of Holy Island*' is highly recommended. Using the book, we were easily able to find both Dwarf Eelgrass *Zostera noltei* and Eelgrass *Z. marina* the following morning.

ANTHONY AND RITA GRAINGER

Photo: Janet John



Lindisfarne Helleborine

Northern Marsh-orchid *D. purpurella* = *D. x venusta*, showing us how to identify it from the stem, leaves and flowers. Shortly afterwards, a good patch of Grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* was seen. We then passed the landmark of Snook Tower and, just beyond the gate, found Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea*, which is quite scarce on the island. Here, there was an island speciality, the dune form of Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella* ssp. *septentrionalis*, which has white

DOXEY MARSHES, STAFFORDSHIRE, 2nd AUGUST

As the train rattles out of Stafford station bound for Crewe, you can glance to your right and see a dreary stretch of water and scrub. These are the Doxey Marshes, on the margins of the River Sow (and in winter indeed, sometimes part of the river). The marshes are managed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust for their abundant birdlife including Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Redshank *Tringa totanus*.

Yet thanks to the organisational skills of Janet John and the local knowledge of Martin Godfrey, it was not ornithology, but botany, which drew a shade under a score of travellers to the Marshes on the first Saturday in August. It was the usual Wild Flower Society mix, ranging from those, like this author, who have only recently established the ability to distinguish Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* from Rosebay Willowherb *Chamaenerion angustifolium*, to eminent former BSBI Vice-County Recorders, all willing to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with each other.

Astonishingly for botanists, we managed to exit the car park without making any discoveries but were soon drawn into an animated discussion about how far plants had to creep from their garden origins before they could be recorded as 'naturalised'. At stake was the status of a magnificent black-fruited One-stoned Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster monopyrenus* which had established itself in the reserve a few inches beyond the garden fence.

It is remarkable how fine-grained the distribution of our native wildlife is. The headquarters of the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, at



Botanists encounter bioblitzers

Brandon Marsh, hosts a large colony of Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* so we locals regard them as part of the scenery - not so visiting naturalists. As I was brought up along the South Devon coast, I was astonished at the reaction to our next sighting, just along the path, of Viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare*. This plant, growing with Fennel *Foeniculum vulgare* and Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, might well have come from a packet of wild flower seed but nevertheless attracted significant attention as a 'rarity' to a sizeable section of our group.

Martin then led us deeper into the reserve, pointing out a fine example of Many-flowered Rose *Rosa multiflora* before drawing up before a stand of 'Stingless Nettle' *Urtica dioica* ssp. *galeopsifolia*. Some of us were then misguided enough to accept Martin's invitation to examine the plant more closely to see if we could see any of the special nettle

Photo: Richard Allanach

‘stinging’ hairs. The several cries of “ouch” at this point confirmed that whilst the ‘stingless’ subspecies may have fewer such hairs than ssp. *dioica*, the plant is still capable of making its mark on the unwary.

We were not alone. Also out in the marshes that day was a team from the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust conducting a bio-blitz. Their find of the day was a Roesel’s Bush Cricket *Metrioptera roeselii*.

Our next two botanical discoveries were Nodding Bur-marigold *Bidens cernua* and Buttonweed *Cotula coronopifolia*. I was surprised to find Buttonweed so far from the sea, but Martin explained that brine had been extracted from beneath the marshes so that even though we were now far from the coast perhaps there were raised levels of salt in the area.

By now we were deep in the marshes, with a landscape dominated by Bulrush *Typha latifolia*, Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria*



maxima, and the marshes were just about to reveal their botanical treasures. Accompanied by a screaming Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* (heard but not seen), we found Branched

and Unbranched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and *S. emersum*, Flowering-rush *Butomus umbellatus*, Blue Water-speedwell *Veronica anagallis-aquatica* and Marsh Woundwort *Stachys palustris*. We also stumbled across a species of Water-plantain *Alisma* sp. but, alas, at this stage we were so close to our lunch spot that we opted for refreshment rather than revealing the plant’s species name by working through our dichotomous keys. For lunch, a bird hide was repurposed as a botanists’ feeding station, with an outlook dominated by Purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, both in the foreground and in great blocks of colour across a lake.



Purple Loose-strife.
Photos by Richard Allanach

Eventually we were guided out of the marshes. The one-mile circuit had been completed at a sprightly pace for botanists, taking only four hours. Many thanks to Martin Godfrey for revealing this watery wonder world with just one unresolved question. What is it about monocots which makes so many of their families (e.g. bur-reeds, flowering-rushes, water-plantains) able to thrive in the wet?

RICHARD ALLANACH

KNOTT END-ON-SEA, LANCASHIRE, 2nd AUGUST

Knott End-on-Sea lies on Morecambe Bay, across the Wyre Estuary from Fleetwood. We met our leaders, Owen and Carol Fawcett and Sheila Wynn, by a statue commemorating L.S. Lowry, who visited regularly in the 1950s and 1960s. Across the estuary, we could see signs of the area's decline since then, a deserted jetty and a silted-up harbour entrance, where there had been a car ferry and a fishing fleet. That change and the pandemic brought loneliness and isolation to the local community. Across the bay, on the other hand, there was a beautiful view towards the Lake District. Seeing the potential for connection with nature to improve mental health, the NHS and Lancashire Wildlife Trust set up a project, 'The Bay – A Blueprint for Recovery'. Our meeting was based on a well-being walk that Owen leads as part of that project.

Owen handed us folders containing information about the flora and fauna of the bay, poems, a quiz and a piece of grass.

Jerusalem Sage *Phlomis fruticosa* from a golf course garden had self-seeded on our path, growing with Sea Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus* and Sand Couch *Elymus junceiformis*. On the sea wall side of the path were Sea Rocket *Cakile maritima*, Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima* and Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum*, Sea Wormwood *Artemisia maritima*, Sea Arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima* and Thrift *Armeria maritima*, as depicted

on the pre-decimal three pence bit.



Ed; For our younger members, before 15th February 1971, the old 3d. coin was worth 1¼ new pence.

Owen and Carol had a wide-ranging knowledge of the marine life of the area and, as well as plants, they introduced us to various delights as we walked along the tideline, including lichens, seaweeds, mermaid's purses and sea urchins.

We descended to the foreshore to Common Cord-grass *Spartina anglica*, the grass in our folders. Until the 19th century, the only UK cord-grass species was Small Cord-grass *S. maritima*. Smooth Cord-grass *S. alternifolia* was introduced from North America and hybridised with Small Cord-grass, forming Townsend's Cord-grass *S. x townsendii*, which, by chromosome doubling, gave rise to Common Cord-grass, now the dominant cord-grass species in the UK. Nearby were Sea Aster *Tripolium pannonicum* and Sea Club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus*. Owen informed us that club-rush tubers were an ingredient in the oldest-known bread, made around 14,000 years ago by hunter-gatherers. Higher up the beach was *Elymus x obtusiusculus*, the hybrid between Sand Couch and Sea Couch *E. athericus*, the latter no longer found in Lancashire.



Common Amaranth

vulgare, Lax-flowered *L. humile* and Western *L. britannicum* ssp. *celticum*, which has smaller leaves. Nearby were Long-bracted Sedge *Carex extensa*, Greater Sea-spurrey *Spergularia media* and Sea Campion *Silene uniflora*.

We had lunch at Barnaby Sands, where we saw Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*. We then headed inland and found Parsley Water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii*. By maize fields, we found Field Pansy *Viola arvensis* and Common Amaranth *Amaranthus retroflexus*.

Near the end we spent a minute listening to the sounds in the woods around us, in the spirit of the Japanese practice of *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing). Thanks to Owen, Carol and Sheila for leading an entertaining and inspiring meeting.

On rocks we saw three sea-lavenders: Common *Limonium*

JANE LOWE

NORTH WALES, 16th and 17th AUGUST

Day 1: Great Orme, Llandudno: A group of fourteen met at the visitor centre on the summit of the Great Orme on a sunny but very windy morning. Our leader, Maureen Parry, introduced us to Sally Pidcock, the warden for the Great Orme, who explained how this important SSSI was being managed in co-operation with the three organisations that share ownership.

The Great Orme is not only known for its specialised plants but also for a range of rare invertebrates, particularly the unique forms of the Silver-studded Blue *Plebejus argus* and Grayling *Hipparchia semele* butterflies.

From the summit, we walked west downhill along the boundary wall of the farm now owned by the National Trust. Here we found Black

Sanicle



Horehound *Ballota nigra* and the rarer White Horehound *Marrubium vulgare*, which is the foodplant for the Red Data Book-listed Horehound Plume moth *Wheeleria spilodactyla*.

Flowering plants were relatively scarce due to the very dry summer but there were occasional Lesser Hawkbit *Leontodon saxatilis* and Mouse-ear-hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum* scattered in the grassland. At one point, several members of the group spent time identifying the leaves of Hoary Rock-rose *Helianthemum oelandicum* on a small limestone outcrop.

Eventually we reached an area of limestone pavement. Here we had lunch and searched the damp, shaded grikes, which provided a

suitable environment for a variety of plants including Herb-Robert *Geranium robertianum*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina* and Black Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* that we had not seen elsewhere. From here, we made a pilgrimage to a long-standing site for Wild Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster cambricus*, heavily protected from grazing goats by wire netting.

We then gradually made our way back to the visitor centre via a solitary, long-established, dwarfed Juniper *Juniperus communis* on another area of limestone pavement.

Many thanks to Maureen for being willing to stand in for Wendy McCarthy, who was unable to lead the meeting, and for sharing her knowledge of the plants of the Great Orme with us.

ROY HILTON

Day 2: Llandudno Junction: Nature is adept at finding odd corners in which to thrive, and, given a helping hand, can quickly transform a barren site into a landscape vibrant with wildlife. Conwy RSPB reserve is one such place. Created just over thirty years ago from silt excavated during construction of the A55 road tunnel under the estuary and then dumped onto an expanse of mud on the outside of a large bend in the Conwy estuary, it was landscaped to create two large lagoons with islands for nesting birds, plus areas of grassland with several temporary pools.

Many trees and shrubs were planted on the reserve in the early days to provide screening from the main road and instant cover for the birds. Other plants have since become well-established in the different habitats of reedbed, grassland and saltmarsh. It was this diversity that attracted a dozen WFS members to meet up on a cloudless August day with the Vice-County Recorder for Denbighshire, Delyth Williams, and local botanist, Maureen Parry, to explore the site.

Water in the lagoons is fresh, not tidal, so water levels are dependent on rainfall during the winter, with additional water pumped from the nearby Afon Ganol, as natural evaporation and transpiration can reduce the water level by up to 1cm every day. At the time of our visit, works on the Afon Ganol had prevented this top-up and, combined with the recent hot, dry weather, this meant that water levels in the lagoons were exceptionally low.

Our first stop was the dried-up lagoon just beyond the café. On the mud slopes we found many flowers that had introduced themselves onto the site: Common Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Red Bartsia *Odontites vernus*, Scarlet Pimpernel *Lysimachia arvensis*, Tall Melilot *Melilotus altissimus*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea* and Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, to name but a few. To our surprise, there were lots of Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, a limestone specialist, growing in the silt. Lower down the slopes was an extensive, dense carpet of New

Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii*, while in a number of dried-out muddy pockets there were patches of Brackish Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus baudotii*. We looked at the sepals for their characteristic blue tips. It was interesting to see that this plant was mostly presenting with submerged leaves despite the lack of water. With careful searching, we found a number of plants with a floating leaf too, so we could observe the typical deeply-cut tripartite leaves. Sadly, the other aquatic plants usually there were simply shrivelled and brown.

Moving along the trails, we came to a small pond which did have some water in it. Reaching in carefully, we managed to abstract some Common Stonewort *Chara vulgaris* to look at. This is a green alga, multi-cellular and superficially resembling land



plants because of its stem-like and leaf-like structures with branches borne in whorls, appearing in clusters around the stem. This alga feels rough to the touch because of



calcium salt deposits on the cell wall, hence its common name 'stonewort'. Hidden in its fronds and painstakingly extracted was some green Horned-pondweed *Zannichellia palustris* and we were able to admire its threadlike leaves close-to.

Further along the track were the grasslands. These had been colonised by a great number of orchids. The display in June would have been spectacular but we had to content ourselves with observing the many seed heads among the crispy brown grasses. Notable among these grasses was some False Fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*. By this time, the sun was beating down relentlessly so we walked briskly to the estuary in

search of a welcome breeze and a seat for lunch. Our chosen lunch spot commanded a splendid view across the water of Conwy Castle and over to the Carneddau mountains.

After lunch we were introduced to a number of common saltmarsh plants growing on the sea wall just below our feet: Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima*, Sea-purslane *Atriplex portulacoides*, Common Sea-lavender *Limonium vulgare*, Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima*, Sea Mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum*, and an almost sat-upon Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum*. Walking back along this estuary path we found some Japanese Rose *Rosa rugosa* and Spear-leaved Orache *A. prostrata*. We searched for but couldn't find any convincing examples of Babington's Orache *A. glabriuscula*, which is also known to be present. From some accessible mudflats Delyth bravely obtained for us specimens of Common Cord-grass *Spartina anglica* and two different glassworts, Common *Salicornia europaea* and Long-spiked *S. dolichostachya*. We spent a little time looking closely at the differences between these two. Last, but not least, we spotted some Sea Aster *Tripolium pannonicum* in the mudflats and a single plant of Greater Sea-spurrey *Spergularia media* just below the path.

All in all, despite the hot and dry conditions that had frazzled many flowers, it was a most interesting and rewarding day and we were very grateful to Delyth and Maureen for sharing their time and expertise.

NICKI MOTTRAM

WOOLWICH COMMON, LONDON, 23rd AUGUST

Geoffrey Hall, our leader for the day, started by introducing us to Woolwich Common. It is acid grassland, now a scarce habitat in London, and is minimally managed, with the poor soil keeping it relatively open.

The long drought in this part of the country was ongoing, so we set off amongst the seeding and dead grasses trying to spot anything not coloured golden-brown. The first things that we saw were some cabbage family members, namely Perennial Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis tenuifolia* and Hoary Mustard *Hirschfeldia incana*, followed by some practice in distinguishing between some of the dandelion-like plants in the daisy family, including Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, Smooth Hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris*, Autumn Hawkbit *Scorzoneroides autumnalis* and Hawkweed Oxtongue *Picris hieracioides*. Common Mallow *Malva sylvestris* provided the most colourful plant initially, with Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea *Lathyrus latifolius* soon joining it. The latter, sprawling along the ground in the absence of anything to clamber up, looked surprisingly fresh. Geoffrey checked the fruits on a not at all fresh dock species - Curled Dock *Rumex crispus*, crispy indeed! Sheep's Sorrel *R. acetosella* was frequent, though the young leaves were somewhat less recognisable than in the spring as many hadn't yet developed hastate bases. The first of our *Medicago sativa* plants was found on this first section of the Common. This one was ssp. *sativa*,

Lucerne, with its fruits curled round twice and always purple-flowered.

Sand Spurrey *Spergularia rubra* was spotted along the edges of a path - Geoffrey said that it hadn't been recorded on the Common until he had found it quite recently and that the whole area had in fact been poorly recorded in the past, presumably considered a 'poor relation' compared with London's 'honeypot' nature reserves and SSSI's.

A little further along, we came to a large patch of Great Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*, evidently making the most of some hidden dampness. Geoffrey then found the perfect lunch spot - next to a well-grown Fig tree *Ficus carica*, providing a choice of sun or shade.

After lunch, we soon found our second *Medicago sativa*, this time ssp. *falcata*, Sickle Medick, with its slightly curved seed pod; this always has yellow flowers. Soon after, we left the Common via a path with interesting mixed hedgerows on either side. There was much debate about a possible Wild Service-tree *Sorbus torminalis*, though many of the leaves didn't have the typical distinctive shape of that species. Geoffrey subsequently contacted the BSBI referee, who confirmed it as Large-flowered Cockspurthorn *Crataegus coccinioides*.

A short walk led us to Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where there is a small 'rewilded' area. Here we found

a variety of native, long-established and newer arrivals, including Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Cotton



Thistle *Onopordum acanthium* and Narrow-leaved Ragwort *Senecio inaequidens*. We also examined our

final *Medicago sativa* in the shape of nothosp. *varia*, Sand Lucerne. This is a hybrid between Lucerne and Sickie Medick, with intermediate curvature of the seed pods and flowers either yellow or purple.

Another short walk yielded a few garden escapes such as Indian Pokeweed *Phytolacca acinosa*, before we arrived at the gates of Charlton Cemetery, where, right by the gates, was a patch of Hairy Finger-grass *Digitaria sanguinalis*. Some of the graves proved quite distracting before it was time for tired but happy botanists to start heading home. Many thanks to Geoffrey for leading a fascinating walk with so much of interest despite the extremely dry conditions. Thanks also to Mario Maculan, who, having feared that we would see very little in arid Woolwich, showed us specimens of some recently established species that he had collected elsewhere in London, including Mediterranean Nettle *Urtica membranacea* and Panic Veldtgrass *Ehrharta erecta*.

BARBARA SPENCE

CAMBRIDGE, 28th AUGUST

We gathered at a Park and Ride bus terminus on the last sunny day of the summer, ready for Alan Leslie to take us to four sites around Cambridge. We set off in four cars for the first site, hidden down a concrete bridleway and notable for two rare grasses: Swamp Meadow-grass *Poa palustris* and American Slough-grass *Beckmannia syzigachne*, as well as Pale Galingale *Cyperus eragrostis*.

Almost inevitably, one car got lost, so I was the first to volunteer to stand sentinel at the roadside, looking out for the stray sheep. Those of you who know my passion for grasses will recognise what a noble gesture this was. I spent ten minutes looking to the world like a fellow who had been stood up on a date. Eventually they turned up.



Great Willowherb

We managed to gather together more successfully for the willowherb site. Expertise is a strange thing. Back in Dorset, I am well known as a botanical expert. In my short street, that is. Whereas on a WFS trip, I am perfectly happy to betray myself as being towards the bottom of the expertise ladder. So, for me, this part of the day was an enlightening masterclass by Alan on how to distinguish a subspecies and its hybrids. The Square-stalked Willowherb *Epilobium tetragonum* native subspecies is ssp. *tetragonum*, but here was also growing the alien ssp. *tournefortii*; the larger flowers face outwards rather than upwards and there are numerous hairs at the

base of the style. Further, Alan showed us the hybrid between the two subspecies, the intermediate-sized flowers facing up and with few hairs at the base of the style. Then there were two more hybrids with the alien, firstly with Great Willowherb *E. hirsutum* (large flowers, four-lobed stigma and no spreading, eglandular hairs on the stem) and also with Hoary Willowherb *E. parviflorum*, with its distinctive, almost square-shaped style.

After lunch, and after scattering Victoria plum stones for the next generation of botanists, we drove further into the city and walked along a path next to a guided bus lane. The bank had been strimmed, apparently to stop brambles spreading onto the path, but several species persisted: Turkish Hazel

Corylus colurna, Crimson-glory-vine *Vitis coignetiae* and Sulphur Cinquefoil *Potentilla recta*. Close by were the old Chesterton railway sidings, a site that will certainly be built upon in the next few years. However, in the meantime, we were shown the hybrid between Dewberry and Raspberry *Rubus caesius* x *idaeus* = *R. x pseudoidaeus*; the form of Wild Strawberry without stolons, *Fragaria vesca* f. *semperflorens*, appropriately bearing two immature fruits; the hybrid between Dark and Great Mullein *Verbascum nigrum* x *V. thapsus* = *V. x semialbum*, with both purple and white hairs around the stamens; and Glaucous Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster glaucophyllus* at the site where it was first recorded in the UK.

It was then time for a coffee break and as we walked towards the pop-up kiosk, we passed two willows, both interesting in different ways. Gmelin's Willow *Salix gmelinii* is native to Siberia, so a long way from home. It was not recognised here

that it sets no seed means the inflorescence does not elongate as the flowers go over, and the calyces do not enlarge; thus, the inflorescence remains rather congested.

Photo: David Caals



Examining Small Love-grass *Eragrostis minor*

until 2019 but was confirmed as such by the BSBI willow referee, who had focused on it in her PhD. Then there was a Golden Corkscrew Willow *Salix x pendulina* f. *erythroflexuosa*, which looked as if it had been transplanted directly from a nursery, but which Alan had monitored from a small sapling, and so was clearly self-sown. The coffee was excellent, served by a Turkish barista, so I was able to chat to him about the novels of Turkey's foremost author Elif Shafak, now in self-imposed exile in the UK to escape prosecution for anti-Turkishness back home. After that cultural interlude, it was a short walk down to the River Cam for the hybrid Common x White Comfrey *Symphytum officinale* x *orientale* = *S. x ferrariense*. The dissection of the calyx in the hybrid is intermediate between the two parents, and the fact

Lastly at this stop, we peered into the gutters for Small Love-grass *Eragrostis minor*, from New England. I tried to engage the local residents in an appreciation of their local flora, even delicately avoiding the alternative name of Smaller Stinkgrass, but I got the pitying disregard which, I suppose, I should have expected. Evening was approaching and some members were falling by the wayside, but several of us could

not resist the lure of the alien subspecies of Stinking Hawk's-beard *Crepis foetida* ssp. *rhoeadifolia*. It grows along the edge of a new country park near Addenbrooke's Hospital and is regularly mown. It has adapted its growth to this indignity and about half a dozen plants were flowering; a very useful difference from the native ssp. *foetida*, growing down at Rye, is that it flowers into August. Finally, there was just time to say hello to a hybrid Grey x Italian Alder *Alnus incana* x *cordata*. Alan said we'd have to see the other hybrids next year, to which Gareth Bursnall commented that we'd all be one year 'alder' by then! My feet registered a despairing movement underground, his forebears turning in their graves. It really was time to go home. A brilliant day thanks to Alan!

DAVID CAALS

CHELTENHAM, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, 20th SEPTEMBER

Fearing the worst after a dire forecast of heavy rain for much of the day, we met our leader, Steve Little, at Cheltenham Spa railway station and were prepared to get very wet. However, apart from a couple of short showers, much to our relief, the threatened rain stayed away.

Our walk was to be along a popular pedestrian and cycle path which follows the route of the Honeybourne Line railway, opened in 1906. After passenger services ended in 1960 and the line was closed and dismantled in the 1970s, it lay disused for decades before the current path was created in the early 2000s. During that time, a wilderness of bird-sown and discarded plants had developed, many of which persist along the sides of the track.

Steve warned us that it was going to be a day focussing mainly on trees, shrubs and climbers, with a few hawkweeds thrown in for variety! He promised us numerous cotoneasters, 6 species of honeysuckle, 3 of barberry and lots of other trees and shrubs.

Cotoneasters are notoriously difficult to identify and require visits to see both flowers and berries, of which, unfortunately, there were very few to be seen this year. Steve has been studying these plants for some time and had had all the identifications confirmed by BSBI Cotoneaster Referee, Jeanette Fryer.

We compared two similar-looking

shrubs: the graceful, arching stems of Franchet's Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster franchetii* and the more upright stems of Stern's Cotoneaster *C. sternianus*, which has blue-green leaves with deeply impressed veins.

Nearby was Waterer's Cotoneaster *C. x watereri*, the hybrid between Willow-leaved *C. salicifolius* and Tree Cotoneasters *C. frigidus*, its leaves being intermediate between those of its parents.

The species that was new to many of the group was Fang's Cotoneaster *C. fangianus*, a large shrub growing on the top on an embankment above a high wall. Steve and a few other intrepid members of the group climbed up to get a better look and provide some samples for closer examination by the rest of us.

For a change of emphasis along the way, we keyed out Narrow-leaved Michaelmas-daisy *Symphyotrichum lanceolatum*, with its distinctive small white flowers, admired the white and pink-flowered varieties of Sowbread *Cyclamen hederifolium* and stopped to examine a mint with a distinctive smell, which John Poland identified as Eau-de-Cologne Mint *Mentha piperata* f. *citrata*.

Amongst the climbers were Winter Honeysuckle *Lonicera x purpusii*, Golden Hop *Humulus lupulus* 'Aureus' and a Grape-vine *Vitis vinifera* growing and fruiting in a hedge outside Waitrose.



After lunch in the Gardens, as we continued along the cycle path, we came across some hawkweeds, including two from Section *Sabauda*, which flower in late summer and have at least 15, and often up to 50, stem leaves: Bluish-leaved Hawkweed *Hieracium salticola*, with its distinctive bluish-green twisted leaves, and later, Autumn Hawkweed *H. sabaudum* f. *bladonii*, which has very few eglandular hairs on the bracts and peduncles compared with f. *sabaudum*.

As we walked along the boundary of the Winston Churchill Memorial Gardens, Steve pointed out self-sown saplings from two of the trees in the Gardens: Manna Ash *Fraxinus ornus* and Indian Horse-chestnut *Aesculus indica*, as well as another cotoneaster species, Spreading Cotoneaster *C. divaricatus*, and Thunberg's Barberry *Berberis thunbergii* self-sown into the wall.

At one point, we veered off the track along a narrow path into what appeared to be a head-high bramble thicket but, thanks to Steve's earlier visit with secateurs, we managed to negotiate it relatively unscathed. Here were various shrubs, including Firethorn *Pyracantha coccinea*, which has hairy petioles, sepals and inflorescence-stalks, and the day's sole example of Wall Cotoneaster *C. horizontalis*.



The last section of the track appeared to have been a favourite place for discarding garden waste as here, well-established in the dense vegetation, were a number of unusual escapes, including Sawara Cypress *Cupressus pisifera*, Leyland Cypress *C. x leylandii* and Chinese Barberry *Berberis julianae*.

Sadly, this was the end of our walk. We were very grateful to Steve for providing such a stimulating day and showing us such a wide range of interesting species.

SHEILA WYNN

AVON GORGE, BRISTOL, 21st SEPTEMBER

The Avon Gorge is remarkable for its diversity of endemic, putative endemic and native *Sorbus* (whitebeams). Research on the taxonomy of *Sorbus* has progressed significantly over the last few decades, not least thanks to the unparalleled contribution made by Libby Houston, who has studied this genus in the Avon Gorge for over fifty years. Libby's knowledge of the Avon Gorge *Sorbus* and all other aspects of the Gorge's rich flora is vast and in-depth, so it was a privilege for the group to be in her company for a day's botanising focused on *Sorbus*.

Peter Hilton and Steve Little, who had meticulously prepared and organised the meeting, were present to greet us and introduce the group to Libby at the entrance to the Great Quarry, on the Clifton side of the Gorge. Before we began, Libby gave us detailed documentation about how to identify and locate all the *Sorbus* species in the Gorge. Armed with this knowledge, we headed to the quarry floor, stopping briefly to identify Common Whitebeam *Sorbus aria*. Shortly after, Libby showed us our first Avon Gorge endemic, White's Whitebeam *S. whiteana*. Likening its leaf shape to a kite, Libby informed us that this whitebeam was first described by Bristol botanist J.W. White in 1920 but identified as a distinct species only in 2006.

Nearby, Libby pointed out another Avon Gorge endemic, Bristol Whitebeam *S. bristoliensis*, which was seen also on the upper rocky slopes. We appreciated its forking

silhouette, which Libby mentioned was one of its diagnostic characteristics. Another endemic, Leigh Woods Whitebeam *S. leighensis*, was then introduced. This whitebeam has inherited horizontally-held branches from one of its parents and has minimal apical teeth. The non-native Sharp-toothed Whitebeam *S. sellii*, notable for its ovate, sharply-lobed leaves with numerous veins, was originally planted in the Great Quarry but has since naturalised extensively. We then examined the endemic Wilmott's Whitebeam *S. wilmottiana*, which is frequent in some of the quarries on the Leigh Woods side of the Gorge. Another non-native, Broad-leaved Whitebeam *S. latifolia*, was observed and admired for its attractive, broadly ovate leaves. The noting of a Rowan tree *S. aucuparia* close by rounded off our time in the Great Quarry. Reassembling at the top of the Gorge



Photo: Nick Aston

near the Observatory, we gathered under the canopy of a planted Bristol Whitebeam. Libby noted that its healthy, lush growth contrasted markedly with the growth behaviour of the trees found on the Gorge's rocky slopes. By the Observatory, we were shown specimens of Observatory Whitebeam *S. spectans* on the cliff edge. Libby collected leaf samples for us to examine, before guiding us down a steep slope to see *S. spectans* up close. Nearby, the blue spires of Spiked Speedwell *Veronica spicata*, one of the Gorge's botanic specialities, provided a brief distraction from studying *Sorbus*.

Returning to the cars, we crossed the Clifton Suspension Bridge and reconvened at the entrance to Leigh Woods. Here we saw a planted English Whitebeam *S. anglica*, looking very angular and arched in shape. Descending Nightingale Valley onto the towpath beside the river Avon, we saw the endemic Avon Whitebeam *S. avonensis*. Libby emphasised its distinct growth behaviour: pronouncedly diagonal when it grows towards the light. This has caused problems when the trees grow along and above the cutting of the railway line that runs alongside the towpath, rendering it susceptible to being cut back. Farther down the towpath, Libby showed us Round-leaved Whitebeam *S. eminens*, noted for its beautifully large, rounded leaves, like table-tennis bats.

Diving off the path towards the bottom of a cliff, we then had to peer upward to see the only known specimen of Houston's Whitebeam *S. x houstoniae*, growing on a

precipitous, rocky ledge. This special endemic, a hybrid between Common and Bristol Whitebeams, was named in honour of Libby, who discovered the tree in 2005. A similar diversion into another quarry, coupled with a climb, was necessary to see Grey-leaved Whitebeam *S. porrigentiformis*.

Before ascending the Gorge up into Leigh Woods, we halted to see the non-native Swedish Whitebeam *S. intermedia*. Heading upwards, some of us made a quick detour onto a quarry plateau to see non-planted English Whitebeam *S. anglica*. The very rare Proctor's Rowan *S. x proctoriana*, the hybrid between Ladder-leaf Rowan *S. scalaris* and Rowan, followed; again, only a single tree is known in the Gorge, growing on an inaccessible cliff face. Returning to the cars through Leigh Woods, we stopped to study German Service-tree *S. x thuringiaca*, the hybrid between Rowan and Common Whitebeam, and Wild Service-tree *S. torminalis*.

On behalf of the participants, we greatly valued benefiting from Libby's incomparable expertise regarding the Avon Gorge *Sorbus*. There is no one else who has studied *Sorbus* diversity within the Gorge with such exemplary dedication and passion. Thanks are due to Libby for inspiring our interest in *Sorbus*, and Peter Hilton and Steve Little for their essential preparations that contributed to a successful day in the Avon Gorge.

NICK ASTON

LEEDS AND LIVERPOOL CANAL, MAGHULL, MERSEYSIDE, 30th AUGUST



Fodder Vetch

The train arrives at Maghull station, which looks like it has been entered for a best-kept station competition. This is the first time that I have visited this town on the northern edge of Liverpool, and the first time that I have joined a field meeting with the Wild Flower Society. The smartly-dressed ladies and charity collectors around the station are a distraction, but my concern remains: how will I recognise the group, none of whom I know? I needn't have worried - a loupe around the neck provides a clear sign that I have found my man.

The forecast is for rain, but we set off

in bright sunshine. When I explore on my own, I keep stopping by things which catch my attention. Today is not going to be any different, which is reassuring. We only get as far as the end of the platform before the group of 13 stops to examine Sticky Groundsel *Senecio viscosus* growing between the railway lines. It is good to have time to look at things rather than just a whistlestop tour. After showing respect to our Elder *Sambucus nigra* (noting its panicle of black berries), we continue exploring verges and a small area of woodland, where the recent rain shows little sign of revitalising the vegetation. Our suburban exploration continues as we examine farmyards and fallow fields. The urban weeds provide plenty of interest, but I find myself having mixed feelings about the fallow field. This looks like it has been seeded with a green manure mix and seems to blur the divide between planted, cultivated land and 'wild' flowers. Nevertheless, the opportunity to compare Fodder Vetch *Vicia villosa*, Crimson Clover *Trifolium incarnatum* ssp. *incarnatum* and Alsike Clover *T. hybridum* with wild pea flowers is interesting.

We take lunch sitting on a churchyard wall, watching the clouds build and feeling the wind strengthen. I am beginning to wonder when we will be seeing the water plants that the walk was scheduled to include. The answer comes as we start again after lunch and cross a swing-bridge to reach the canal towpath. Spits of rain

threaten to dampen the enthusiasm but it never really gets any worse, so we are able to enjoy the main event. Dense stands of Lesser Bulrush *Typha angustifolia* alternate with Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, whilst the channel is filled with Fringed Water-lily *Nymphoides peltata* and Floating Pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*. Our leader tempts disaster by leaning out to grab Nuttall's Waterweed *Elodea nuttallii* and Fennel Pondweed *Stuckenia pectinata* for us to look at. On the bank we familiarise ourselves with Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Trifid Bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita* and Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata*. The promised water plants are delivered.

The group is welcoming and knowledgeable and the format gives sightings of a multitude of species.

Our leader had clearly done plenty of preparation beforehand as he had staked out a variety of plants. It is tempting to suggest that certain themes were present. A variety of poisonous plants had been selected - Black Nightshade *Solanum nigrum*, Hemlock *Conium maculatum* and Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* - and the delights of olfactory botany were demonstrated - Pineappleweed *Matricaria discoidea*, Stinking Iris *Iris foetidissima* and Stinking Tutsan *Hypericum hircinum*. A sign of the best events is that they raise as many questions as answers and I now have several hours consolidating the sightings by consulting my books, so this really has been a good day. Many thanks to our leader, Peter Gateley.

TOM GILES

CHOBHAM COMMON, SURREY, 13th SEPTEMBER

Chobham Common comprises 574 hectares of lowland heath, with more than 300 species of flowering plants. It is the largest NNR in the SE of England.

Our meeting, led by Marion Ryder, started at the Staple Hill Car Park, where 13 members gathered. From here, we were led by Marion through typical heathland vegetation of Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Cross-leaved Heath *E. tetralix*, interspersed with both Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Dwarf Gorse *U. minor*. Amongst all these was Bristle Bent *Agrostis*

curtisii, growing, in profusion, at its most easterly location in Britain. Bristle Bent is a food plant for the Grayling butterfly *Hipparchia semele*, several of which were seen during the day. Other grasses noted were Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, Mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, the last being more frequent in the wetter areas. There was the occasional Broom *Cytisus scoparius* in flower and then a single flower head of a grazed specimen of Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*. This was followed by Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, also still flowering. We then



arrived at an open wet area dotted with the exquisite flowers of Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe*. This was our target species for the morning and was much enjoyed.

As we began our route back, we passed Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus* in a ditch, Marsh Cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum* on a muddy track and Goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea* on the edge of a wooded area, all in flower. We then stopped at a dried-up pond and found both Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and the less common Oblong-leaved Sundew *D. intermedia*. In the same area was the fine, mat-forming grass, Velvet Bent *Agrostis canina*, spreading across the damp ground. Our last plant of the morning was spotted as we got closer to the road: Stinking Fleabane *Diurachia graveolens*, with its yellow flower heads. This introduced plant was new to most members. Although it has been in Britain for more a century, it has only spread extensively along the road network in southern England during the last few years.

At lunchtime, we moved north of the M3, near to Burma Road. We were joined here by Andi Roy, the Biodiversity Officer for Runnymede, who guided us on our afternoon walk. He took us firstly to a recently-disturbed dry area, where we found Moth Mullein *Verbascum blattaria*, and then across extensive wetter areas of heathland. Eventually he led us carefully off the path to look at a damp scrape. Here we saw several small shoots of the rare Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*. Stepping back, we admired all the plants around it: Deergrass *Trichophorum germanicum*, White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba* and Bog Aspidel *Narthecium ossifragum*.

By request, Andy then took us to see an introduced bog plant - Yellow Pitcherplant *Sarracenia flava*, which had, at some point, been planted on the Common and was well-established but at least was not spreading. In the same wonderful bog amongst the *Sphagnum* spp. was Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and, on the edges, Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*. Walking back, in a shallow pond, we saw Trifid Bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and on the edge of the track was Star Sedge *Carex echinata* in fruit. Finally, back near our cars, we saw the bright flowers of Deptford Pink *Dianthus armeria* at the entrance to the industrial estate.

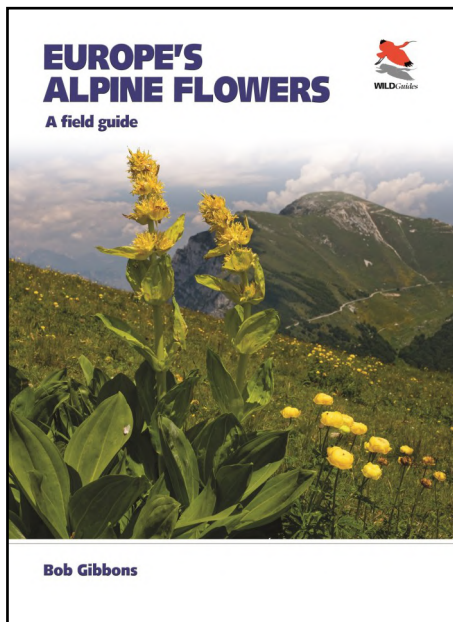
Thank you to Marion for arranging an excellent day's botanising.

SUE DENNESS

BOOK REVIEWS

Books to look out for:

Europe's Alpine Flowers - A Field Guide: Bob Gibbons: Princeton Press WILDGuides (2025): ISBN 978-0-6912-3078-8 (Paperback) and eBook available: Publisher's price £25.00.



This is the life crown for our late friend and brilliant photographer Bob Gibbons. It's illustrated entirely by him, of course, and every species account (almost 1,800 plants) reflects his detailed knowledge and experience of this type of flora, including our few British and Irish species. His generosity with his knowledge was legendary and this echoes throughout this lovely book. For anyone planning an alpine holiday, or indeed wanting to grow alpenes, this book is a MUST, and I

am loving it just for dreaming over - it will always be within reach of the sofa!

Non-native Invasive Plants of Britain and Ireland: Fran Giaquinto & Phoebe O'Brien: Pelagic Publishing (2025): ISBN 978-1-7842-7564-8 (Paperback) and Ebook available: Publisher's price £29.99.



This book will probably be most useful to garden designers needing to know what **not** to plant where it might escape, and ecologists needing to be able to identify plants 'frequently encountered across Britain and Ireland with well-documented evidence for invasive behaviour' which are 'listed on the main legislation that governs invasive species in Europe, Britain and Ireland'. For most WFS members these will already be familiar. A nicely produced book, though I do find Pelagic publications rather expensive.

RO FITZGERALD

OBITUARY: MARY PRISCILLA GILLIAN TOLFREE

7th JUNE 1931 - 12th SEPTEMBER 2025

Priscilla was born in London on 7th June 1931 to Faith and her husband William Norman 'Peter' Tolfree. They were both teachers in Lagos, Nigeria, but Faith returned to England to give birth to Priscilla apparently due to the earlier loss of their twin sibling. Soon after the birth, Faith returned to Nigeria, leaving Priscilla to be brought up by her grandmother, Mary Wordsworth, near Salisbury. An early memory was of taking her first steps on a grass lawn and being entranced by her first sight of what she later



learnt was a daisy and she remembered thinking "what is that wonderful object" as she fell over towards it. Perhaps a forerunner of her botanical interest?

Her mother returned to England with her second child, a baby boy, Patrick, who quickly became Priscilla's beloved younger brother. The three returned to Peter in Nigeria where they lived until Priscilla was six when the family moved back to Hampshire. In 1939, one of her cousins contracted scarlet fever, so along with her brother they were sent off to Northumberland. A year or so later,

her mother took them to live in Braithwaite, near Keswick, where they lived before moving to a house at Tirril, near Penrith, in 1944. Without doubt, these years in the Lake District engendered Priscilla's love of the countryside and mountains, as she climbed Scafell at the age of 12 and skated across the frozen Derwentwater to go to school. She recalled many happy memories of this time in Cumbria, of roaming the countryside and being with Cumbrian people. This was a magical time in her life. However, big changes came at the age of 14, as she was sent to boarding school near Cromer, Norfolk, and then at 15, with the unexpected death of her mother.

Priscilla attended Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, to study modern languages, gaining an honours degree. Ever sporty, she enjoyed rowing - for one year "every day of the week". After university, she had a brief encounter with teaching, which she disliked. However, this somehow led to her gaining a diploma in librarianship. She worked at several libraries, including three years in the House of Commons Library. Aged 28, Priscilla applied to Manchester University Library, probably to be closer to her father in the Lake District and to gain better access to real countryside. She remained there until she retired.

For Priscilla, the great outdoors was an enduring passion, as were walking, rock climbing and skiing. She was highly accomplished in the

latter, completing the legendary Cannelloni ski run in Italy, "one of the 10 hardest in the Alps". She regularly travelled in Europe and enjoyed walking and botanical holidays in the Alps etc., often with Cox and Kings.

Priscilla had a love of plants from an early age and learnt much from close relatives. She joined the WFS in 1970 - North West Branch (N3). In those days, new members started in a Beginners' Branch, with those attaining the greatest annual total progressing to a Winners' Branch and keeping annual diaries for two years until they had achieved a total of over 700, before progressing to Valhalla and a cumulative diary.



Priscilla, shown of the left, putting notes into her pad.

The write-up accompanying her second annual diary reports her clinging precariously to the cliffs of Humphrey Head in Cumbria to see Goldilocks Aster *Galatella linosyris*. Clearly her rock-climbing prowess proved most useful! After her third annual diary, and a total of 900 plants, she moved to the Winners' Branch (North) H1 and to Valhalla in 1975. She continued sending in a diary most years until 1997, when her list had reached a total of 1,853

plants.

Priscilla had many botanical friends, far too numerous to mention individually. For my part I first met her in 1973 at a WFS Church Stretton meeting. After what might easily have been a rocky start, we became good friends and I came to regard her as something of a big sister. Along with others, we botanised in Lancashire, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Snowdonia, Cambridge, Breckland, the Lake District and Scotland. I remember our 1975 trip to Ben Lawers, Caenlochan and Glen Clova; some days we spent so much time on the mountains that we hardly had time to make a meal before lights-out at the Braemar and Glen Doll youth hostels. There were memorable moments, from high crags above Mardale, watching a Golden Eagle soaring just below us, to a Herdwick ewe that sadly fell to its death from Hobcarton Crag as we climbed the treacherous cliffs in search of Alpine Catchfly *Silene suecica*. Then there was the two-week grand tour of Scotland, when eight of us took in as many notable botanical sites as possible.

It wasn't just botanical treasure that interested Priscilla; she was also an active recorder, feeding into several county floras: Northumberland, Durham and, most particularly, her beloved Cumbria. For the latter, she earned special thanks in the introductory chapter as one of the core active recorders. I remember her joy in finding a new site for Twinflower *Linnaea borealis* in County Durham whilst square-bashing. From 1995 to about 2010, she was active in recording more locally as a member of the South



Priscilla was also active in the wider social and intellectual sphere, being a member of a local book group, poetry group, chamber concert society, Manchester Civic Society and Chorlton Good Neighbours. She also regularly attended St. Clement's church near her home in Chorlton-cum-Hardy. All these reflect her lineage, her great-grandfather and William Wordsworth being brothers, something she never mentioned to me in thirty years, until my wife noticed certain family paintings hanging at her home.

Priscilla died on 12th September 2025; her funeral was held at St. Clement's church. The church was full, which to me says much about the high esteem in which she was held. Her eulogy described not only her life story (parts extremely sad) but her warmth, kindness, good will, concern about friends and generosity with her time.

My thanks to Priscilla's family for permitting me to precis parts of their eulogy text.

PETER JEPSON

Photographs provided via Peter Jepson.

Rainy WFS meeting days in the past.



June 2011, Barnack Hills and Holes



September 2011, Cherry Hinton

