

The Dorset Heath

The Newsletter of the Dorset Flora Group

2010 Events

Your committee has organised a range of events this year. Our usual field trips, described by Peter Hawes as “Visiting nice places, with interesting plants and knowledgeable leaders” will continue as before. We have managed to arrange more events towards the West of the county than in previous years, which we hope will give members living nearer to Devon than Dorchester a chance to join in. We also have high hopes of including a Fungi Foray this year, details awaiting confirmation.

Wild Flower Week 2010 follows on from the successful event run over 9 days in 2009, and takes the same format. All of the walks this year are to new sites and offer a superb taster of the Dorset flora. Why not make the week a holiday and try a new site every day? There were some members and visitors that did just that last year and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

The third activity in 2010 is an extension of the more specialist field trips and botanical training leading on from previous Bog Orchid surveys and the Grasses training course. Ted Pratt is planning to lead group members in a complete survey of the Western valley of the National Trust’s Godlingston Heath for *Hammarbya paludosa*, Bog Orchid, after previous short visits have suggested that this is a site of county importance for this elusive and tiny plant. Numbers will be limited to ensure that the surveyors can be directed to cover the ground methodically. The Grasses course is repeated on 12th June and a new course on sedges will be run in addition. We have also planned a search of the only known Dorset site for *Herminium monorchis*, musk orchid and a survey of the rare *Viola lactea*, Pale Heath Violet. The Chairman, Robin Walls, gives more information on the BSBI’s threatened plants project below.

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Wildflower Week 2010

Members will be pleased to know that Wildflower week will take place again in 2010 after a very successful first event last year. In total well over 200 people joined the 14 walks which took place at sites all over Dorset - only one walk was seriously rain affected! We hope to do even better this year, when we will visit lots of new sites from Abbotsbury in the

extreme west to Steamer Point, Christchurch, in the extreme east. All details follow on page 4.

2010 Programme

Programme. All meetings begin at 10.30am and end about 4pm unless stated otherwise. Details of the planned sedge identification course and the group's first fungi foray will be circulated later. All meetings in 2010 are joint with the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society. All are welcome; our leaders will be pleased to help inexperienced wildflower enthusiasts with identification skills. Numbers on some trips are limited; if you plan to attend please contact the leader. Please include a telephone number in case of overbooking and weather problems. If you require a written confirmation please enclose S.A.E. We ask that members do not bring their dogs to the meetings.

Saturday April 24th **Queen's Copse** Leader Peter Hatherley. Meet opposite Holt Wood SU033058. We aim to see Small-leaved Lime and Spurge Laurel in this Forestry Commission wood and hope to re-find an earlier record of *Carex strigosa*, thin spiked wood-sedge.

Saturday May 15th **Stoborough Heath (Stocks Wood)** Meet on Grange Road in a lay-by south of the railway bridge SY919847. At this meeting we aim to visit Dorset's best site for *Viola lactea*, Pale Heath Violet, which is considered nationally threatened. This is part of the BSBI's national threatened plant recording scheme. We will then ask members to visit a number of other sites on the Dorset heaths to search for this plant.

Saturday May 29th – Sunday June 6th Dorset Wildflower Week
The full events programme follows on page 3.

Saturday June 12th **Beacon Hill** *An introduction to identifying Common grasses.* Robin Walls and Jon Crewe. Booking essential through Dorset Environmental Records Centre 01305 225081. There is a charge of £10 (Non members £20). Cheques payable to DERC please.

Saturday June 26th **Batcombe Down** Robin Walls and John Newbould. This SSSI site has an interesting mix of chalk downland, scrub and acid chalk heath, formerly much more extensive in this area. We will be searching for *Herminium monorchis*, musk orchid, in its only Dorset site, but expect other interesting aspects of the flora to be found as the day progresses. Meet in the car park on the side of Gore Hill, SY635055.

7th - 9th and 12th - 15th July **Godlingston Heath - Bog Orchid survey** with Ted Pratt. Meet at Dean Hill mini car park SZ017819. This is a joint venture between the National Trust and the Flora Group; it will take place over a number of days, weather permitting. Experience has shown that we need about eight people each day, so booking is essential. Book for as many days as you can commit - to Ted on 01929 427299. We hope to confirm the status of this site as one of the finest

locations for Bog Orchid in the country. Wellingtons essential. Walking stick helpful. Please say if you can bring a GPS navigator -we need as many as possible.

Saturday July 17th at **12 noon Wild Plants of the Dorset Chalk, Lyscombe Farm**

Sean Cooch and Jonathan Cox, Natural England.

Chalk grassland, small woods, butterflies and fine views.

Meet at the entrance to the track that leads to Lyscombe Farm from Drake's Lane, between Cheselbourne and Piddletrenthide, grid ref. ST732004. There is an open area where cars may be parked. Bring footwear suitable for rough ground and steep slopes, and a packed lunch if required. Ticks may occur at this site. Please book beforehand with Natural England (01300 060 4812).

Saturday 14th August **10.30 – 12.45 Wareham Common** - Ted Pratt.

This is a training meeting where beginners and improvers can get some help with Wetland plants. Meet outside Wareham hospital, SY918874 and please bring Wellingtons.

Saturday 28th August **Marsh Gentians at Holt Heath** - Robin Walls.

The group will attempt to re-survey known sites for Marsh Gentian on this National Nature Reserve. Grayling butterfly and heathland birds should also be seen and we will record the flora of the site as we go. If time permits we hope to look at *Fallopia dumetorum*, Cope Bindweed, in its only extant Dorset site nearby.

Dorset Wildflower Week 2010

Date	Event	Leader
	<p>All walks are suitable for children unless marked *** Children under 14 welcome if accompanied and supervised by an adult.</p> <p>Walks are free of charge except Durlston on 30.05.10 and Steamer Point on 05.06.10 (£3/£2); you may be invited to make a voluntary donation on others.</p>	
29.05.10 Saturday 2.30pm	Stanpit Marsh: Free car park at SZ172925, 50 yards past the Ship in Distress pub. Please note that this is a popular site and the car park often fills up – other parking may be a short walk away. Coastal salt marsh and acid grassland flora and many birds.	Tim Wilkins 01722 342746 or 07736 073463
30.05.10 Sunday 10.30am	Eggardon Hill: Flowers of chalk grassland on an Iron Age hill-fort; attractive views. Park at Shatcombe lane picnic area - FREE car park – SY549948.	Peter Cramb 01308 488019
2.30pm	Durlston Country Park: Superb hay meadows. Meet at Durlston Visitor Centre – SZ031773 (car park charge).	Ted Pratt – bookings to Durlston 01929 424443
31.05.10 Monday 10.30am	Ringstead Bay Monday May 31st: Ringstead Estate National Trust. Meet in the NT car park at its eastern end SY760823. Access is via Upton from the A353. This is a cliff top walk to White Nothe. The path is narrow and numbers are limited to ten.	John Newbould To book phone 01305 837384 ***
2.30pm	Bracketts Coppice – DWT nature reserve. Grid ref. ST514074. Gate entrance and small car park on S. side of minor road, 2 miles due N of Corscombe and 3 miles W of Halstock.	Tony Bates – book via DERC on 01305 225081
01.06.10 Tuesday 2.30pm	Powerstock Common Flower Walk Maximum number – 20 Not suitable for wheelchairs. Meeting at Powerstock Common car park Grid ref SY546 974. Directions: From A356 follow road to TOLLER PORCORUM. Continue through village (Bridport). At ‘T’ junction (about 1 mile beyond Toller turn right. Follow road downhill and car park is just before old railway bridge. Powerstock Common is a former hunting forest now managed by the Dorset Wildlife Trust and has a variety of habitats harbouring a wide range of plant life.	Brian Godfrey 01300 320 833 or email brian@rowanstp4 1.fsnet.co.uk Please book no later than Tuesday 25 th May 2010.

<p>05.06.10 Saturday 10.30 am</p> <p>10.30am</p>	<p>Hambledon Hill NNR: Fine Chalk grassland flora in a fascinating site.</p> <p>Steamer Point Local Nature Reserve A mix of woodland, cliff top grassland and shore species. Meet at Steamer Point information centre, end of Seaway Avenue, Christchurch SZ197929. Car park charge or bus route X12 Bournemouth – Lymington.</p>	<p>Andrew Branson 01747 838223</p> <p>David Leadbetter on behalf of Christchurch Countryside Service Bookings to Steamer Point Nature Reserve : 01425 272479 Maximum 20</p>
<p>06.06.10 Sunday 10.30am – 1.00pm</p> <p>2.30pm</p>	<p>Portland Bill Meet outside the Lighthouse Visitor Centre at the Bill. There is plenty of parking but there will be a charge. Walking will mainly be on flat ground, but will be uneven and rocky in places.</p> <p>Abbotsbury Beach Shingle and coastal plants, including uncommon species. Meet at Abbotsbury Beach car park, SY 560846 (car park fee required). Sturdy footwear required for shingle.</p>	<p>Bryan Edwards Book by calling 01305 225081 Contact on the day will be 07779 695101</p> <p>Jonathan Cox Bookings to Natural England 01929 557456</p>

Dorset Wildflower Week 2009



An introduction to the Plantlife Lowland Juniper Project

Plantlife International, the wild plant conservation charity, has been investigating the reasons for the decline of Juniper, one of our three native conifers, for over a decade. Concerns for the well being of this plant were noted as long ago as the 1960's when Lena Ward and Alistair Fitter, among others, began to survey existing populations. In the south of England these were mainly confined to the chalk, where stands of thousands sometimes occurred. A few isolated populations occurred on the heaths, particularly in the New Forest although in the North and Scotland the plant frequently haunts moorland. This note describes some of the southern populations which I visited this summer while on contract to Plantlife; we hope that a more detailed account of the whole project will follow in the future.

Southern populations of the typical sub-species, *Juniperus communis communis*, are found from Sussex to Gloucestershire and North to Buckinghamshire, with outliers in Kent and Cornwall, whereas sub species *hemisphaerica* is found only on the Lizard peninsula. One of my first Juniper trips was a visit to the spectacular downland slopes of Devil's Dyke, near Brighton. Arriving early, I had time to explore alone and quickly found two fine bushes. I also had an early experience of the health and safety hazards of the job! Juniper seems to prefer steep slopes – mostly very steep. One does not so much walk up to a juniper bush as climb, scramble and slither. Great care must be taken to resist the temptation to cling to the juniper itself for security – branches can be broken off quite easily and this does not sit well with the best conservation intentions! After surviving the scramble down the hill I met with Charlie Caine, the NT Head Warden for the area and followed him to another nearby site. Charlie is a fell runner among many other talents, and following his long strides up the side of Devil's Dyke requires rather more fitness than I possess; suffice to say that I took a long time over some vital photos while my breath returned.

Another difficulty arose at this site, in that I learnt of the existence of a book that claimed that the Junipers here had been planted by Brighton Council in the 1960's. Plantlife aims to conserve naturally occurring native species, and this discovery cast doubt on the status of the Devil's Dyke bushes.

More research required to check the origin of these bushes, if the suggestion was true, and an early pointer to the fact that this was not going to be the most straightforward of jobs.

An even greater demand on my fitness and agility came in Gloucestershire where I had to walk up Cooper's Hill, site of the famous Cheese rolling contest. Those who choose to run down this hill have my utmost respect! The single remaining tree at this site is in fair health but tucked away in a shaded position to one side. Elsewhere in Gloucestershire some good stands of Juniper remain, particularly on Rodborough and Minchinhampton Commons. Seeing these superb limestone grassland sites in September made me determined to return in the summer to see the full range of flowers, which includes musk, frog and bee among 13 species of orchid, pasque flower and abundant clustered bellflower. Juniper seedlings seen on two sites here were sadly among the very few seen in visits to more than 20 sites across the south.

Local sites for Juniper are unfortunately lacking; it would not appear to have ever been a common plant in Dorset, and as far as we know is now represented only by a single plant on Compton Down. This bush is quite small and of unknown origin; it could be bird sown, but there is often a question mark against such isolated plants. The species has been planted in various locations over the years, sometimes by local volunteers concerned about dying bushes on their favourite patch and also by local councils with a conservation agenda. There are substantial plantings on St Catherine's Hill near Winchester, known to be from local stock, but the origins of the more noticeable plantings on the M3 cutting are less well established. The aim of the Plantlife project is to preserve native stock; regrettably this has not always been a clear objective of landscape planting schemes.

The work directed by Julia Carey for Bucks County Council at a site named Grangelands probably exemplifies the necessary approach. The management team has already achieved success here with the use of exclosures in which numerous seedlings have appeared. The follow on work from this is to test natural establishment on bare ground, and some

scrapes have already been created, ready for seed to be scattered. I look forward to returning here to investigate the success of this work; the site has excellent chalk grassland and a large population of the attractive Roman snail, judging by the numerous shells that litter the grassland. One of the best aspects of visiting Juniper sites is that those bushes that remain seem to have chosen their refuges at least in part for the views; a sunny day in Buckinghamshire, surrounded by orchids, bellflowers and quaking grass while Red Kites slowly pass overhead has much to recommend it. Jon Crewe.



BOOK REVIEW

Shorter Wild Flower Walks in Dorset, by Peter and Margaret Cramb, 2009.
Reviewed by Edward Pratt.

Peter and Margaret, two of our members, have already written and published the excellent *Wild Flowers of the Dorset Coast Path* and *Wild Flower Walks in Dorset*. This new book was written in response to the suggestion that they should write a book of shorter walks, those in their previous book being, on average, about 5 miles long. The ten walks in this book average just under half that.

The authors and their printer (Henry Ling Ltd, The Dorset Press, Dorchester) are to be warmly congratulated on such a splendidly produced and printed book.

A map at the beginning shows how the walks are spread around Dorset. Then for each walk there is recommended time of year to see the flowers at their best, statement of difficulty about the walk, directions to car parking, and lastly details of public transport, refreshments and toilets, where those exist.

That is followed by a description of the route, together with beautifully produced maps of each one. The description includes short lists of special flowers that should be seen at particular places, helpfully put in italics. But it does not end there: within each walk there is a short article about a geographical feature of the walk and/or about two of three of the species that may be seen; each article accompanied by a beautiful photograph, superbly reproduced (by scanning slides taken with 100ASA Fuji film, I have been told). There are plenty of photographs of other flowers too, and some paintings. Finally each walk ends with a list of the species that may be seen on it.

112 pages, £7.95, 15 x 21cm – a good size for a rucksack. If your local bookshop does not yet stock it, suggest they order in some for the season, from the authors at 32 Pitchers, Salway Ash, Bridport, DT6 5QS.

On the trail of Tubular Water-dropwort

Tubular Water-dropwort was one of the ten species for which people were asked to search in 2009, as part of the BSBI's Threatened Plants Project (TPP). It was the only one for which there were quite a number of old records in Purbeck. It is one of the easiest umbellifers to recognise, having a small number of distinctive clusters of flowers. I undertook this search both because I had checked some old sites in the previous four years, which therefore did not need searching again, and because I knew some of the relevant private landowners.

Most of the sites were on private land adjoining the River Frome, or on the RSPB's closed Arne Moors reserve, so permission had to be sought. It was always granted.

In Purbeck the species is usually to be found in the ditches of water meadows. It is difficult to spot unless it flowers. But its flowering depends on how much other vegetation there is in the ditch. It can be choked by Reed, Reed Canary-grass or tall sedges for example. In numbers of its old sites it was not found because the ditch had not been cleared in the last few years. In some other meadows the grazing was heavy and it was probably undetected for that reason.

Most old sites were six-figure map references made before the days of GPS Navigators. Some recorders took more trouble than others in recording these. Also, sometimes the site may have been close to the boundary of a six-figure reference, so it was difficult for them to decide how to record it. Bearing that in mind, when searching for old records I almost always look beyond the edges of a six-figure reference area. But I do not often search the whole of the adjoining four areas – to do so in all directions would make a search five times as long.

Tubular Water-dropwort was not found in 40 former sites. However it was found in 38 sites, 11 of those being updates of old sites. This appears to be a reduction from 51 to 38, but it is not a cause for concern, because the old records were made over 1980 to 1996 - a much longer period of time than the five years of the recent search.

Edward Pratt



2009 Field Trip reports:

Many thanks to John Newbould for providing these interesting and informative accounts of our days out.

April 25th, 2009

Shermel Gate to Rushmore Golf Course

This meeting being a joint meeting of the Dorset Flora Group and the Dorset County Boundary Group was very much in the nature of unfinished business from the field meeting of 2008. The first sector of woodland known as Foxbury Lower Hedge was reported in 2008, but the slightly later date allows us to report some ground flora species not noted in 2008. Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) was quite common being parasitic on Hazel. In addition, Archangel and Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*) were present along the boundary. To the west, where the Longcroft Road forms a north-south divide the nature of the ground flora alters with Bracken, Bluebell and Yorkshire Fog being dominant in an English Oak Silver Birch woodland. Here Ted Pratt and Robin Walls identified the Lady's Mantle *Alchemilla filicormis* subsp. *vestita*.

Walking west along the boundary through Chase Woods, there is a current management policy of keeping deer to selected areas using deer fencing together with clearing understory and doing coppicing. From the Longworth Road the ride north of Great Shaftesbury Copse is quite wide and although Bracken is present there is an interesting ground flora. This included Adder's Tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*). This tiny fern (although recorded in old grassland and on woodland rides across Dorset (Bowen, 2002) is easily overlooked. Ted Pratt and Robin Walls were kept busy with Southern Woodrush (*Luzula fosteri*) and Hairy Woodrush (*L. pilosa*). Were we missing the scarcer hybrid? The view was we did not. Ted Pratt found Common Twayblade (*Listeria ovata*) and John Newbould found spikes of Greater Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*). Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) were an occasional find. The more acidic nature of the soil meant that Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) saplings were present in the Beech plantation to the north.

We crossed the Bridmore Ride, where in the autumn of 2007 we observed the large Beech avenue being felled. These trees have now been replaced by new Beech with the saplings protected by wrought iron fencing indicating the owners wish to see the magnificent old trees replaced. Here Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Town Hall-clock (*Adoxa moschatel*) were observed in the Beech and Hornbeam Plantation. Crossing Oxford Street into Monk Arundel Coppice, we once again encountered more acidic soils with Pedunculate Oak, Ash and Silver Birch in the woodland with Scaly Male Fern (*Dryopteris affinis*) and Bracken part of the less species rich ground flora. On finding the Golf Course, we retraced our steps.

May 16th 2009

Ackling Dyke and Harley Wood Leader John Winterbottom.

In quite strong winds, just five people turned up for this interesting meeting. Initially we walked south along Ackling Dyke with Down Farm on our west side. In recent years, partly by introduction and partly naturally, this section of Ackling Dyke has become wooded and enclosed. At the start of our walk, part of the bank was exposed revealing that its construction was based on quite large flints with earth. Although the wooded area is mainly on chalk, Field Maple was quite scarce but Sycamore and Ash were common. Beech has been introduced on the east side together with the occasional Yew (*Taxus baccata*). Of particular interest under the Beech were a number of spikes of White Helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*) and near Harley Gap two spikes of Bird's-nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) were present. This orchid requires deep humus and often may not be found in the same place subsequently. There is a record from Harley Wood in the *Dorset Rare and Scarce Plant Register* dated 1991.

At Harley Gap, we walked west a short distance along the public footpath to see Field Mouse-ear (*Cerastium arvense*). JW felt that this plant is increasing at this site, which Bowen (2002) maps mainly in this north-east area of Dorset along track sides. The intermittent hedge contained Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) and Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*). The seed heads of Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), also seen here, contained the gall *Urophora jaceana*.

We returned to Harley Gap to walk south east along the south side of Harley Down enabling us to survey Harley Wood to the south. Once again, we were surveying Ash-Field Maple-Dog's Mercury woodland interspersed with areas of Beech Plantation and Hazel Coppice. Here the most interesting area was an area of the NVC **W25** Bracken-Bramble scrub with a Bluebell and Yorkshire Fog dominated ground flora. Growing amongst large areas of Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*) was a square metre patch of Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) re-finding a 1994 record of G.F. Field (Edwards and Pearman, 2004). Interestingly, this area proved to be the best for bird song with Chiffchaff, Robin, Great Tit and Chaffinch noted. A pair of Buzzard hawked Harley Down as we had lunch. Skylark was present on Wyke Down as we returned to the car.

June 20th, 2009

Tadnoll DWT Nature Reserve Leader Karen Banks.

The party set off at a brisk pace to climb Old Knowle in order to get a higher view of the survey area. A small area of Fox and Cubs proved to be *Pilosella auranticum* ssp. *campaathicola*. Much of the northern area is above 25m AOD and is typical Dorset heath with heather based - plant communities, together with associated species. Typically these are not species rich but on warm days in habitats specially created to be devoid of vegetation basking areas for the Reserve's six species of reptiles have been provided. It is however, in the low-lying areas of the Reserve that many of the interesting plants area found. We were asked to assist in up-grading the mapping of the rarer species. We soon found White-beaked Sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), nearby Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and Slender St. John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*). A single bush (in flower) caused a moments pause for thought but was quickly identified as Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) before surveying a small ochreous dyke, which drains Galton Heath to the west. Here the dry heath had become wet with Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) and water plants such as Water Plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), Water Chickweed (*Myosoton aquaticum*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and Tussock Sedge (*Carex paniculata*).

Following lunch, the party moved to the valley floor to survey the water meadows, passing *en-route* nine large plants of Royal Fern (*Osmundia regalis*) located on an old field boundary. These water meadows are of exceptional quality managed by light grazing with cattle. The sward height is around 300mm, with few coarse herbs, no scrub and a herb and small sedge cover >30%. In addition, the meadows contain a number of plants scarce in Dorset *e.g.* Greater Burnet (*Sanguisorbia officinalis*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*) and at least ten species of sedge including a ditch dominated by Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*).

During the day, Jon Crewe reported Hobby over the Prison Farm fields, Yellowhammer was calling during lunch and there were numerous Chiffchaff. It was a poor day for Butterflies with just small numbers of seven species including: Small Skipper, Silver-studded Blue on the heath, and a single Small Heath in the water meadows. We also saw a number of Banded-Demoselle (*Calopteryx splendens*) and a single Small Red-damselfly (*Ceriagrion tenellum*).

July 11th, 2009

Godlingston Heath NNR Leader Ted Pratt.

Some twenty members of the Dorset Flora Group arrived in the Ulwell lay-by, before transferring into a smaller number of cars to survey Godlingston Heath for Bog Orchid (*Hammarbya paludosa*). We had assembled in driving rain, one week earlier than in 2008 with the objective of searching the mire where we had located around 30 spikes. The initial plan was to start at the Golf Club end and work northwards in a line counting the orchids and using GPS meters to note the locations. However, we decided to start at the point where the orchids had been located in 2008. The result after surveying about one tenth of the mire was an impressive 116 flowering spikes. Generally the orchids were found in a Black Bog Brush mire in 25mm of water associated with White-beaked Sedge (*Rhynocarpus alba*) and Bog Pondweed

(*Potamogeton polygonifolius*). Bog Orchid has a mainly Atlantic coast distribution, with a single site in Norfolk, sites in the New Forest and our Dorset plants representing the east coast lowland heathland (Preston *et. al.* (2002). The plant needs plenty of light and moisture, low nitrogen levels and reaction value of 1 (Hill *et. al.* 2004). Robin Walls commented that although the orchid was found in around 25mm of water the general water level of the mire is around 250mm at the bottom of the *Schoenus* tussocks, with a pH of around 4.5.

Earlier in the morning, we were shown all three British sundews together with both hybrids all within a radius of 20m. In spite of the rain, Mr J. Cox spotted a single Purple-bordered Gold moth. We also saw a single Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*).

August 1st, 2009

Hartland Moor NNR Leader Ted Pratt.

Once again, members of the Dorset Flora Group impressively turned out in Wellingtons and waterproofs to search for Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*). Bowen (2004) provides a list of historical sites, but credit for this extant location goes to members of the British Pteridological Society who visited the area in 2008. However, at least 250m of the fen are still to be searched. It is a perennial fern of fen carr or open woodland requiring permanently wet conditions, light and low nitrogen favouring a reaction value of 6 (Hill *et. al.* (2004). Its stronghold in Britain is the Norfolk Broads (Preston *et. al.* 2002). In addition to Marsh Fern, we were shown Narrow Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) and looked for the hybrid *D. carthusiana* x *dilatata* without success. Robin Walls comments that: “the Narrow Buckler-fern is a plant of wet shady places in southern Britain, especially carr in our area. It is fairly frequent in this habitat on the Tertiary sediments of the Hampshire basin. It is also found further west extending into Devon.”

Another speciality of Hartland Moor the Dorset Heath (*Erica ciliaris*) was seen and nearby we were shown its hybrid with Cross-leaved Heath (*E.tetralix*) whose scientific name is *Erica* x *watsonii*. Other heathland specialists included a single Marsh Gentian (*Gentian pneumonanthe*) and White-beaked Sedge. In the very wet conditions few birds were flying but Green Woodpecker was heard calling and a single Silver-studded Blue butterfly made a bedraggled appearance together with a Slow-worm. Robert Aquilina collected some 20 invertebrates in the Pillwort pond including the notable scavenger beetle *Hydrochus angustatus*. Plant galls were recorded and reported elsewhere.

I am indebted to Ted Pratt and Robin Walls for reading through the report and drawing my attention to errors and adding important comments. An archival copy of the records associated with this report has been deposited at Dorset Environmental Records Centre.

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Dorset Flora Group

Vice-county notes

Projects for 2010

Threatened Plant Project (TPP)

Many of you will know about the TPP, if you do, skip the remainder of this paragraph. The BSBI began the project two years ago with a view to getting a better national picture of our scarce plants. Each year they have chosen ten species and then a random selection of known sites for the species. They asked the recorders to visit the chosen sites within their vice-county and report on the size of the populations, the associated species, etc. If there is time we are encouraged to survey all known sites without a recent record. Most vice-county recorders (vcr) have involved other botanists and this is obviously sensible, so I would like to invite DFG members to join in this year.

The BSBI have published the species, but not yet sent me the sites we need to search in Dorset. However, with one exception, I am hoping we can visit all the sites. Only six of the species occur in Dorset:

Chrysanthemum segetum Corn Marigold

Herminium monorchis Musk Orchid

Hordeum marinum Sea Barley

Juniperus communis Juniper

Melittis melissophyllum Bastard Balm

Viola lactea Pale Dog-violet

The first one is widespread, as we found out last year doing the arable survey for FWAG, and it has wildly varying populations. So we will probably not manage a complete census. Juniper has been the subject of recent study (see Jon's paper). The remainder are in very few sites; subject to access permission, we should be able to visit them all and search for new sites. In the programme you will see we plan a trip to find the pale dog violet. This is not an easy plant to identify and hybrids are known with other violets. Once we have sorted out these problems and got our eye in, I'm hoping we can reliably record the remaining sites during its flowering season. Later in the year we plan to go to the one site for musk orchid. It has not been recorded there for a few years, so an exhaustive search is well worthwhile. No prizes have been offered for finding it yet, but there is consolation for failure; the hillside has many other calcicolous grassland delights to enjoy. All we need now is warm sunny weather.

Dorset Rare Plant Register search list

DERC in conjunction with the BSBI published the hard copy in 2004, written by Bryan Edwards and David Pearman. Ever since Bryan has kept a list of the older records and encouraged us to visit the sites and confirm the plants are still there. As the new vcr it falls to me to take on the responsibility of updating the DRPR at some time. Last year's list has been updated with all the records I know about and is available from me or DERC as a spreadsheet, or of course, we can print it out when needed.

I have removed the sites that have been refound or been proved to no longer hold the species, but the 'searched and not found' sites are still there, with a date and name of the searcher. Ultimately we will probably have to conclude the species has been extirpated, but I've not yet thought of the rules for doing that – the ghost orchid story is a salutary lesson. I have added a few extra sites which would be worth searching for a variety of reasons. Please send records to me as soon as possible; the sooner I can update the list, the lower the risk of duplicating effort. We are exploring ways of making the search list available live.

Long-stalked yellow sedge (*Carex viridula* ssp. *brachyrrhyncha*)

This is a scarce plant in southern England and a nice plant to find in a fen. The Dorset RPR lists five sites and mentions others that have been rejected. Few have been visited recently and it would be nice to check up on its distribution and how well the populations are doing. There is a problem in that the closely related yellow sedge (*Carex viridula* ssp. *oedocarpa*) is common and can look very similar. Most of the time it is a small sedge with slightly curved stems found in acid habitats that can be relatively dry. Although not mentioned in the floras, it can grow more upright and to well within the range of *C.v.brachyrrhyncha*. Unfortunately this habit is more frequent in circum-neutral mires and flushes, leading to a potential mis-identification.

If anyone finds a *C.v.brachyrrhyncha* I would like to have a voucher specimen to deposit in the Dorchester herbarium (if the population is too small, I will come and see it *in situ*). One of the characteristics is the down-turned beak, a feature not easily seen in pressed specimens. Please collect a complete stem with leaves and fruiting head (not roots) and a vegetative shoot and send them to me fresh in a polyethylene bag, so long as this can be done within a few days. Otherwise it would be safer to press the specimen.

Incidentally, we are hoping to revive the herbarium in the museum. Peter and Margaret Cramb have been diligently working their way through Mansell-Pleydell's herbarium for some time. There is a box of Humphrey Bowen's unmounted material and we are hoping to acquire Prof. Good's herbarium, which will also need mounting. All we need is the time, the space and most of all, money to buy acid-free herbarium sheets.

Brome grasses (*Bromus* sp.)

Another group of plants where I would like to see specimens is the smaller *Bromus* species. Soft brome (*Bromus hordeaceus*) has a number of subspecies. The very common *hordeaceus* is not of interest, but it can vary enormously in size. Particularly confusing are the small plants with a single spikelet that grow on dry, sandy soils, often near the sea. They can be mistaken for the scarcer subspecies: *feronii*, *thominei*, *divaricus*, or *longipedicellatus*. Slender soft-brome (*Bromus lepidus*) is a closely related species that can be difficult to distinguish. I suspect all of these are under-recorded and often misidentified. The new grasses handbook (T. Cope & A.Gray, BSBI, 2009) has some very useful pointers to identifying these taxa and clear drawings.

Other searches

One of the TPP species from last year was the frog orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*). This I failed to find at the specified site (I was a little late in the season) and talking with other botanists I wonder whether this orchid is less common than we think. Another plant that cropped up in the conversation was bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), aka the more descriptive 'stars-in-grass'. Both occur in similar habitat and invariably with plenty of other lovely species. Fortunately much of our chalk downland is now open access, so the tedious business of seeking permission is avoided. I am wondering whether we can run a census of both species this year. As with the musk orchid, this will take you to some prime sites. A full species list from the site would be appreciated even if the target species is not found, but please send in the negative records.

Kew's Millenium Seed Bank would like *Thesium* seeds from Dorset (Ted Pratt is coordinating this. Please contact him if you would like to help: email e.pratt@uwclub.net— telephone 01929 427229. So there is another reason for looking for sites, but please do not collect seed until you have full instructions from the MSB and we are sure the site can stand it.

General recording

Dorset's flora is relatively well known in terms of distribution at the tetrad level. Not that that means we know everything – there is still plenty of fun to be had. I would like to move forward from simple species records into a better understanding of the ecology and habitats. To this end I would encourage collection of species lists for well defined sites, in preference to a grid square. And if a single species is the interest, the use of the rare plant recording form. If you do not want to use the form, at least keep it as a check list and record the information listed.

Report on 2009

TPP

The list of species did not arrive until well into the season last year. We did manage to visit all the sites chosen by the BSBI, but not to conduct a full survey of the Dorset populations. Success ratings were rather poor. We could not refind the long-leaved helleborine (*Cephalanthera longifolia*), frog orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*), heath cudweed (*Gnaphalium sylvaticum*), opposite leaved pondweed (*Groenlandia densa*) or tubular water dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*) at the designated sites. I did find *Groenlandia densa* in some ditches whilst surveying for other reasons and Ted Pratt reports on *Oenanthe fistulosa* in Purbeck on page 9.

The only species found in quantity was copse bindweed (*Fallopia dumetorum*) at one of its two sites. Two groups looked independently at the other site without success and I think it is probably lost from there.

DRPR searches

Working from Bryan's 2008 list, several members have been checking on county records not seen for many years. I have yet to go through DERC's records but to date 55 sites have been re-found and are now better recorded. That leaves 776 sites on my list of which 72 were visited but the target species could not be found.

Arable Plant Survey

Those of you who came to the AGM will have heard the introduction to this project from Kate Still of Plantlife. The Dorset Arable Project was developed by the Dorset Arable Group, led by FWAG. At the end of 2008 FWAG invited Bryan Edwards and me to their meeting to discuss the possibility of DFG helping with a survey of arable farms. Birds and other aspects were covered, but there was not much known about the status of the weeds (I'm not supposed to call them that, but you know what I mean). Bryan had some experience of arable surveys and produced a form; together we wrote the methodology. In 2009 Ruth Wilkins was appointed project officer and made all the arrangements with the farmers (as well as finding time to get married). We invited likely volunteers to a training day with lunch provided. We know about free lunches, so we all walked away with at least one farm pack wondering how long it was all going to take.

Well, it takes the best part of a day to walk the complete perimeter of a dozen arable fields and it is fair to say some were rather dull. But I think we all found the experience rewarding. We discovered species we had not seen before, improved identification skills and lost a bit of weight. It is much more relaxing to botanise with full permission and even encouragement than 'nipping over the hedge' to investigate a likely spot. The outcome is a far better idea of the status of this guild of species in the county and information that will feed into the farm environment plan with a positive outcome in terms of management.

New Records

I hope in future years to provide a summary of exciting finds. Apologies for not doing so this year – a combination of not getting properly organised as vcr and other deadlines. Please send me your records of new sites and re-finds from the DRPR search list for me to accumulate into a report for the year. First and second county records will be sent to the BSBI for publication in *Watsonia*. All will be lodged with DERC unless there is a specific request to the contrary.

R.M.Walls, vice-county recorder for Dorset

Flora of the British Isles

If any of you are thinking of buying the 3rd edition of Clive Stace's **New Flora of the British Isles** (due out next month) but haven't yet placed an order, Amazon are offering it at £37.50 and no delivery charge. That's a saving of £11 over Summerfield Books.

And finally...

I hope you have enjoyed the Newsletter—and that printing it off hasn't used up too much ink. It can be read on screen, but many people prefer to print. Comments can be sent to any of the Committee, or to DERC. The name The Dorset Heath can be permanent or not as we choose. Suggestions of other names would be welcome - we can put them to the vote later in the year.

Jon Crewe
Secretary
04/02/2010

DFG Events Programme 2010

Saturday 24 th April	10.30am	Queen's Copse
Saturday 15 th May	10.30am	Stoborough Heath (Stocks Wood)
Saturday 12th June	10.30am	Beacon Hill grass identification course
Saturday 26th June	10.30am	Batcombe Down
7th –9th and 12th—15th June	10.30am	Godlingston Heath Bog Orchid Survey
Saturday 17th July	12 noon	Lyscombe Farm-Wild Plants of the Dorset Chalk
Saturday 14th August	10.30am—12.45pm	Wareham Common
Saturday 28th August	10.30am	Marsh Gentians at Holt Heath

Dorset Wildflower Week

Saturday 29 th May	2.30pm	Stanpit Marsh
Sunday 30 th May	10.30am 2.30pm	Eggardon Hill Durlston Country Park
Monday 31 st May	10.30am 2.30pm	Ringstead Bay Bracketts Coppice
Tuesday 1 st June	2.30pm	Powerstock Common
Wednesday 2 nd June	2.30pm	Corfe Common
Thursday 3 rd June	10.30am 2.30pm	Radipole Kinson Common
Friday 4 th June	10.30am 2.30pm	Purbeck Wares Sutton Poyntz
Saturday 5 th June	10.30am 10.30am	Hambledon Hill NNR Steamer Point LNR
Sunday 6 th June	10.30am 2.30pm	Portland Bill Abbotsbury Beach

Full details of these events are available in the DFG newsletter and on the
DERC website www.derc.org.uk/local/dfg.htm

Projects for 2010 to get involved in

- BSBI Threatened Plant Project: six nationally scarce plants to re-find
- Dorset Rare Plant Register search list
- Long-stalked Yellow Sedge (*Carex viridula ssp. brachyrrhyncha*) - voucher specimens wanted
- Brome grasses (*Bromus sp.*) - voucher specimens wanted
- Frog orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*) & Bastard Toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*); two 2009 TPP species to re-find
- Arable Plant Surveys