



## **Welcome to our Winter Newsletter**

*John Denham, acting Chair*

After a wonderful summer we have much to look forward to in the coming year. Our programme of events is even busier than 2022, with meetings, trips and walks taking us through to next summer, and lots in planning for the rest of the year including a highlight for me – an autumn three day trip to Cambridgeshire's Great Fen. Do contact our organisers on the numbers given to book a place and look out for our booking forms that are widely circulated and available at our monthly meetings, or check our website

We are pleased to welcome a new member to our committee. Jim Bullett is a long-time member of our local group and has often saved our bacon by getting the technology to work at meetings when nobody else could! Jim will strengthen the IT element of the committee.

As a group, we are fortunate in having so strong a committee but more help is always welcome. If you would like to join our committee, or feel you can help in any other way, please contact me on [john.denham50@gmail.com](mailto:john.denham50@gmail.com).

Finally, we receive lots of brilliant photos to accompany trip reports and always try to include a couple. Sadly, with so much going on we haven't been able to include any in this edition. But many grace our website and we will make up for it in future editions!

## **Martin Down & the Devenish 6<sup>th</sup> June**

*Report by Jean Young*

The chalk grassland and scrub of Martin Down offered a rich variety of flora including orchids and valerian. It was a little overcast for bees and butterflies but we saw Adonis and small blues fluttering about. The many species of birds included corn buntings, stonechats and meadow pipits.

My attention was caught by a small leaf beetle on a yellow composite flower; due its shiny green colouring it was hard to miss. I couldn't work out what it was doing but there appeared to be something emerging from its rear end that it seemed to be manipulating with its rear legs. Was it eggs or poo? On further investigation when I got home, it turned out to be a bit of both. It was one of the 'pot beetles' probably *Cryptocephalus aureolus* and was producing a 'pot'. The females produce an egg and coat it with their faeces before dropping it into the leaf litter below where the larva develops, protected within the pot.

At the Devenish nature reserve, we walked up a steep path through mixed woodland to the top of the downland slope. It opened into a flower-rich meadow where we had a brief rest before the hilly ascent. Our time was limited but I'd like to revisit the woodland we saw on the way up due to the abundance of dead and decaying wood. It is an incredibly valuable habitat and becoming increasingly rare due to the trend for 'tidying up' and yet over 2000 species of invertebrates in Britain rely on it

## **Greenham & Crookham Commons 7<sup>th</sup> July**

*Report by Philip Chambers*

On arriving at Greenham Common, we made straight for the Control Tower, which gave a good view of the site including NATO fuel tanks now transformed into ponds. We learnt how bugs are consuming hydrocarbons of contaminated earth.

Walking the site, we watched dung beetles at work on dispersing seeds and improving the recycling of nutrients. The spear thistle lace bug *Tingis Cardui* was spotted. At 3-4 mm long, this is a beautiful mystery in miniature.

Amongst concrete bunkers: Exmoor ponies, St John's wort, Essex skipper, mating beetles on hogweed, solitary bee on viper's bugle. The common mallow with its rich heliotrope-pink petals and male stonechats in full plumage. Red-tailed bumblebees, ubiquitous ragwort, crested-dog's tail grass, wild parsnip, ringlet butterflies. The slender crowded spike of little starry flowers that is agrimony.

To add to our ever-growing list were the matted stems of restharrow, with their flowers like pink tongues. Finally, the emperor dragonfly, with the largest wingspan of any British dragonfly, completed our day.

## **Indoor Meetings, what's coming up:**

Held at 7:30pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms, Church Street, Malvern, WR14 2AY. Adults £2.50. Children free. Non-members welcome.

### **Thursday December 1st 2022**

**The Wildwood and Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland.** Dave Taft, local naturalist & U3A Natural History member. The prehistoric "Wildwood" and its remnants today.

### **Thursday January 5<sup>th</sup> 2023**

**The Best of Britain: From Ardnamurchan to the Forest of Dean,** and the excitement of finding wildlife on your home patch. Tom Mabbett from "Nature Trek"

### **Thursday February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023**

**Sandy Badlands.** Andy Harris, Northern Reserves Officer WWT. About heathlands, focussing on The Devil's Spittleful and Rifle Range and the restoration of Dropping Well Farm.

### **Thursday March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023**

**Forest of Dean Beavers: the story so far.** Kate Wollen, Assistant Ecologist, West England Forest District. Beavers were introduced to a seven hectare site in 2018 in one of the earlier enclosed trials in the country.

### **Thursday April 6<sup>th</sup> 2023:**

**The Role of Citizen Scientists in local river monitoring projects.** Alice Deans, Unlocking the Severn project. A look at two very different projects on the Severn and the Teme.

### **Thursday May 4<sup>th</sup> 2023:**

**Great Malvern's Woodford Meadow – a year in review.** Richard Newton, leader of the U3A Natural History Group. This urban, flower-rich meadow has been studied by our U3A group for just over a year.

## **Three Walks in 2022**

Report by Neil Edwards

## **Trips and Walks 2023**

See our website for full details of all trips & walks

[www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk](http://www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk)

### **1. Wildflower Walk around British Camp**

Following a very entertaining talk entitled '45 years of Botanising around the Malverns', Gerry Davies led a walk along the eastern pathways around British Camp.

We walked from the main car park on a very clear, bright late spring morning, stopping frequently for Gerry to point out and discuss many of the diverse plants bordering the path. Then up to Millenium Hill, noting large areas of the rarer hillside heathers and wavy hair grass.

For the botanists in our group, hand lenses were soon in use as ground plants became smaller. Gerry's expertise led him to notable species, including nationally scarce spring cinquefoil, the upright chickweed, lesser trefoil, bird's-foot clover, little mouse-ear and wall speedwell.

Gerry pointed out the *Taraxacum erythrospermum* dandelion, Britain's smallest dandelion, along with yellow archangel, creeping buttercup and wild thyme.

The walk provided really spectacular panoramic views but all agreed there was much to be gained by looking directly downwards sometimes!

### **2. Hill Court Farm Nature Reserve**

At Hill Court Farm we had an opportunity to enter parts of the reserve normally closed to the public.

The walk was led by Tomos Holloway, the Trust's Southern Reserves Officer, who explained that, prior to its acquisition, large areas of the site were intensive dairy and arable farmlands but are now being restored to grass meadows and wetland marshes, providing a habitat for ground-nesting birds and wildfowl. Water channels and pools have been created and parts of the reserve are grazed by cattle on a rotational basis.

Tomos pointed out many willow trees that are pollarded cyclically to control growth. **Red kites, skylarks, lapwings** and a **reed warbler** were seen and heard, and butterfly enthusiasts enjoyed good views of many **marbled whites, large skippers** and **common blues** as well as an unexpected **brown argus!**

Green hay from Boynes Meadow had been spread to encourage a more diverse mix of wildflowers. In other areas, **chicory** and **yellow rattle** were clearly establishing territory, together with **tufted vetch** and **grass vetchling**.

Many thanks to Tomos for his time and for enabling us to visit the restricted area of the reserve.

### **3. Butterflies at Old Hills**

For the final walk of our 2022 programme, the group gathered at Old Hills common to meet Mel Mason and Liz Lloyd of West Midland Butterfly Conservation.

With hopes that the sun would break through, Mel explained the importance of data collected from the many transect surveys carried out around our area in general. 28 species had been recorded at this site to date.

In the top of oak trees, several **purple hairstreaks** were identified, with **meadow browns, marbled whites** and **ringlets** in abundance. Mel led us to a stand of elm trees where, amongst the young sapling and honeysuckle growth, **green veined whites, gatekeepers** and two mating **silver washed fritillaries** were seen. In nearby brambles, some of the group were lucky enough to see both **white** and **red admiral** on the same branch. At the end of our walk, there was another treat in store. With butterfly net expertly swung, Mel caught, and then released, his prize of the day – an **Essex skipper**.

### **Trips:**

For more information or bookings, phone **Lyndon 01905 455222**. It's worth putting your name on the reserve list.

**February 4th: A boat trip on the Exe estuary** taking in flocks of wintering waders and Devon's stunning scenery.

**April 22-25: Anglesey:** a four-day (three nights) trip exploring the island's flora and fauna.

**May 6<sup>th</sup>: Wrexham: Minerva and Marford Quarries,** Rewooded quarries with many species of birds, invertebrates and orchids. North Wales WT site.

**May 19<sup>th</sup>- June 4<sup>th</sup>: Connemara (Galway coast) and The Burren (Co Clare).** Staying in Clifden, Co Galway: visiting the Connemara area, Inishbofin and Clare Island. Then, staying in Ballyvaughan, Co Clare, to visit the Burren and Inishmore island. *Currently full. Reserve list operating.*

**June 8<sup>th</sup>: Barbury Castle, Jones Mill, & Fyfield Down (nr Swindon).** Range these adjoining sites for Iron Age hillfort, unimproved grassland, fen and glaciated landscapes.

**July 11<sup>th</sup>: Five reserves near Abingdon.** Roam at will these four BBOWT reserves and one NNR – a variety of environments for birds, butterflies and wildflowers.

### **Walks:**

For more information and to book your place, phone **Neil Edwards on 01684 564288**.

**Walk at Lower Smite Farm – Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April at 10am (approx 2.5 hrs).**

**Limit of 15 so booking essential. Ring Neil on 01684 564288**

Led by Steve Bloomfield, Senior Conservation Officer at WWT. Donations will be invited for WWT.

Meet at the farm car park off Smite Hill, WR3 8SZ, S0892588

**Late Spring Walk at Eastnor Deer Park – Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> May at 10.30am (approx 2.5hrs).**

**Limit of 15, so booking essential. Ring Neil on 01684 564288**

Led by local naturalist, Cherry Greenway. Pre or post walk refreshments available. Donations will be invited for WWT. Meet at the Woodshed Café directly off the A438 opposite the castle gates. S0732372

**Dragonflies & Damselflies at Ripple Pits – Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June at 10am (approx 2.5hrs).**

**Limit of 15, so booking essential. Ring Neil on 01684 564288**

A walk at Ripple Pits led by local birder and dragonfly enthusiast, Andy Warr. Donations will be invited for WWT. Meet at the Fisherman's carpark at the end of Ferry Lane from Uckinghall village. S0865376

**Butterflies at Monkwood nature reserve – Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July at 10am (approx 2.5hrs).**

**Limit of 15, so booking essential. Ring Neil on 01684 564288**

Led by Dominique Cragg, Western Reserves Officer. We will also visit Green Farm, which is being acquired by the Trust. Donations will be invited for WWT.

Meet at the Reserve carpark at WR2 6NX (nearest). S0804607

**Other walks and trips may be arranged at short notice** and advertised via the Malvern Group email list and website: [www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk](http://www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk). To be on our mailing list, contact [malverngroup@live.co.uk](mailto:malverngroup@live.co.uk) (you can unsubscribe at any time).