



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Malvern Local Group

Winter 2023

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Barbury Castle & Fyfield Down

Report by Phillip Chambers 8th June 2023

Swallows swoop, a kestrel sits on steady air, buzzards and kites soar above and the jerky song flight of the whitethroat rings out from the hawthorn as we make our way towards the sixth century hillfort, Barbury Castle. Among the banks and ditches, rock-roses, common milkwort, a heath spotted orchid, marsh fritillaries enjoying the wild thyme and scores of burnet moths. The hoary plantain, its purple stamens giving the flower-head a reddish appearance, and the highly edible salad burnet harbour small copper and common blues and, on these chalk downs, the Adonis blue. Brown argus on the sage and tiny white flowers of the fairy flax. Skylarks sing, ascending above sheltered ditches and silky silverweed, small heath, dingy skipper, waves of whispering grass, saxifrage, a longhorn beetle, yellow shell moth, the red hues of campion and sorrel, swifts, house martins, a thick-headed fly.



Marsh fritillary and green hairstreak. *Jean Young*

A pause at The Ridgeway, Britain's oldest road, broomrape and a spear thistle lace bug. Two brimstones, a green hairstreak and a solitary red admiral open our account on Fyfield Down. A rapidly repeated note, sounding like a bunch of jangling keys: a corn bunting on top of a fence post. A

picture-winged fly on a spear thistle and a wall butterfly. Over Fyfield Down, as we make our return journey, in what is now searing heat, the buttercups gleaming gold under a cloudless, azure sky. A pair of speckled woods flirting and fluttering, a silver y moth, a fluorescent yellow spider, lady's bedstraw, field scabious and greater stitchwort.

Indoor meetings 2023-4

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

November 2nd 2023. Fungi and Tree Structure

Bob Watson, Head of School of Forestry & Woodland Management at The National School of Forestry. Fungi and their effect on tree structure and survival.

December 7th 2023. Wetlands for People & Wildlife

Jackie Harris, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
A look at WWT's mission and four major bird conservation projects at home and abroad

January 2nd 2024. Nature reserves talk by staff member of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. TBC

February 1st 2024. Don't Count Your Butterflies Before They Pupate

Mel Mason, project Leader/Vice-chair West Midlands Butterfly Conservation

Update on the Malvern Hills Lost Fritillaries Project and the reintroduction of pearl-bordered fritillaries.

March 7th 2024. The Work of the Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Gary Farmer, Manager, Vale Landscape Heritage Trust. Conserving orchards & flower-rich grasslands in the Vale of Evesham. There will be a guided walk to Hipton Hill orchards, a VLHT reserve, in June.

April 4th 2024. Creatures of the Twilight

Paul Wilkinson, herpetologist & ecologist for British Waterways

Vampires, dragons and flying mice!

May 2nd 2024. The Fascination of Plant Galls - Identification, Biology & Ecology.

Dave Taft U3A Natural History Group

What causes these strange and wonderful growths?

Hardwick Green Meadows

Chris Greensmith, WWT trustee and warden at Hardwick Green, introduced his talk with a 2017 clip from BBC Midlands Today about the floodplain meadows project at the site. We have lost 97% of lowland meadows (intensive farming, drainage, development, gravel extraction) since the 1940s. This small site of 20 hectares makes up almost 2% of what remains of floodplain meadows in the UK.

Chris has conducted detailed research and important conservation work at Hardwick Green for several years. He described three connecting areas, purchased by the Trust in 2018. Two water courses, Marsh Brook and Longdon Brook, flood every winter, leaving valuable deposits of river silt. Hay is harvested at the end of summer and cows graze on the aftermath until the water levels rise. This same pattern was followed on the meadows for centuries. Today, they support a diversity of wildlife.

Chris showed films from trail cameras and his own photographs revealing otters, badgers, a regular jay, yellowhammers, a kingfisher, hares, bats, a young deer and a variety of butterflies. Skylarks? Definitely heard but as yet unseen! Chris informed us that orchids have doubled in number – from one recorded last year to two this year! With the help of the National Lottery Heritage Fund and private donors, two new bridges have been built to assist access over the brooks and across the fields. During a break, John Denham described the work of the Hardwick Green Oral History Project. He played excerpts from field recordings made with local residents, some with reminiscences dating back to pre-war years.

Chris then got down to the technical stuff with graphs and charts aplenty! An important part of his research was to establish whether the floodplains at Hardwick Green could be classified as MG4 Meadow Grassland (Mesotrophic Grassland). This was established through detailed research into the site's hydrology and testing the water tables. He demonstrated the use of markers at 25 dipwell sites, established with the help of Worcester University students. Chris checks the dipwells regularly in all seasons and in weather ranging from stunning heat to finger-numbing cold!

There is still plenty to do on this long-term project with many unanswered questions relating to the unusually low water tables on the meadows, suggesting that the meadow's MG4 status is supported by soil impermeability as well as seasonal inundation. The focus of continuing conservation work: the preservation of valuable ecosystems, supporting pollination and carbon storage. Chris also credited the work of PIG (Plant Identification Group) in recording various species of plant life in the meadows, many of them increasingly rare.

Trips and Walks 2024

See our website for full details of trips & walks. Limited places, booking essential.

Walks

For more information and to book, email Tim Lawrence at: tmlbhf@gmail.com quoting in the subject line: **mlgamble**.

Wednesday 8th May 10am. Gerry Davis will lead a walk from British Camp to the Broad Down area of the Malvern Hills. Meet in British Camp car park.
Thursday 23rd May 10am. Park inside gate on first field. A walk across Hardwick Green Meadows led by Tomos Holloway. A rare opportunity to visit.
Tuesday 11th June 10am. Gary Farmer from Landscape Vale Heritage Trust will lead an orchid walk on Hipton Meadows. Meet at Hipton Hill Orchard car park. WR11 4UA.
Tuesday 2nd July 10am. Butterfly walk on the Old Hills led by Mel Mason. Meet at south car park.
Friday 12th July 10am. Steve Bloomfield will lead a walk around Lower Smite Farm, WWT headquarters. Meet in car park.

Trips

For more information or booking, phone Lyndon Knott on 01905 455222. Pick-ups are from the Malvern Splash car park unless otherwise indicated.

Saturday 3 February London Wetland Centre
Depart 7.30am £22 + entrance fee (free for Wildfowl and Wetland Trust members, please indicate on booking form). The major Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust centre in West London.
Friday 12 – Saturday 20 April Lundy
This holiday is fully booked. To be put on the reserve list, phone Lyndon on 01905 455222
Tuesday 21 May 2024 Warwickshire Wildlife Trust
Depart 8.00am. £19. Visiting four nature reserves in the Stratford/Leamington area.
Saturday 15 June 2024 Leicestershire Wildlife Trust
Depart 7.00am. £21. Visiting Cossington Meadows in the Soar Valley North of Leicester and three other nature reserves.
Wednesday 26 June 2024 Lower Moor Farm.
Depart 8.00 am. £21. A Wiltshire WT site covering 500 acres (four contiguous reserves): orchids, butterflies, birds, dragonflies & water plants.
Wednesday 10 July 2024 The Doward Reserves
Depart 08.00 am. £18. Hereford WT nature reserves: The Great Doward: King Arthur's Cave, Leeping Stocks, Lord's Wood, Miner's Rest, White Rocks and Woodside.
Sunday 18 – Tuesday 20 August 2024 Whale watching in the Bay of Biscay.
Details to be finalised! Sailing from Plymouth on Brittany Ferries 'Pont Aven'. Two nights on board in single or twin cabins, with a brief stop-over in Santander.