

# West Oxfordshire Field Club



*Newsletter No. 112 Autumn 2020*

## **EDITORIAL**

Fog steals across the landscape, silencing the traffic noise almost as effectively as lockdown did. The silence breaks. A robin in full winter voice, a clear treble, nature's equivalent of the solo choirboy singing "Once in Royal David's city" at a Christmas service. A halo of yellow roses pierces the gloom, persistent despite the recent frosts – nature can do Christmas lights, too. The robin is interrupted by a noisy gaggle of young starlings, scrapping over the suet balls. As the daylight fades, more wild sounds – the local flock of snow geese pass overhead, their calls reminding me of the many books I read as a child as I dreamed of visiting the Arctic.

So many of my memories are linked to a moment in nature – the excitement of seeing a "new" wildflower (skullcap) for the first time on the Somerset levels with my botanist aunt, lying on my back at the summit of Dunkery Beacon, the highest point of Exmoor, eyes glued to the silhouette of a skylark singing far above, or parked at a Dorset crossroads at

dusk with my recently widowed mother, seeing her delight as we watch a barn owl hunting right in front of us.

For many people, this strange summer has revealed nature in some unlikely places, as they have had time to stop and stare. For others, trapped at home, it has brought a realisation of how much being in the countryside, or simply in a green place, really means to us. One of the delights of this summer has been the plethora of butterflies. Marbled White and Small Copper made their first appearances in my garden in over thirty years. Red Admirals managed three emergences in my village, some lingering until well into November. I recall a telegraph pole with Red Admirals scattered down it like fridge magnets, warming their velvety new wings.

The first "distanced" walks the Field Club held felt like a release from detention. Planning ad hoc walks has its advantages –

we can take advantage of spells of good weather or of a time when a reccy reveals that a particular plant is flowering. For the less active members, I hope Mary's newsletters have helped to bring back memories of more energetic times and the chance to relive in

memory some of the special places we have visited. I wish you all a happy Christmas, and a green New Year, and look forward to the time when we can meet in person again.

*Jill Bailey*

### **YOUR NEWSLETTER**

In this strange time of lockdown, we have not had our usual programme of walks, nor the weekend away and the Summer Party. Once lockdown was eased, we started an impromptu series of 'distanced walks' of just five members and a leader, sometimes repeated on demand so that more people

could enjoy them. It is these reports that are included in this newsletter. So a big thank you to those who sent in reports and pictures. If anyone wants the full species lists, please contact me. Please send items for next year's Spring Newsletter by the end of March, please.

*Jill Bailey (Newsletter Editor)*

[j.bailey@ecofeatures.co.uk](mailto:j.bailey@ecofeatures.co.uk)

### **REPORTS OF FIELD MEETINGS**

#### **Broadwell Airfield walk, 17 & 19 June 2020**

A total of 16 members visited Broadwell Airfield, a good botanical site, on 17 and 19 June for the first of our 'socially distanced' walks. The meadow alongside the runway is always impressive for its abundance of Pyramidal Orchids, and a less common plant worth keeping an eye out for is the Hairy Tare, a tiny relative of the vetches. The Grass Vetchling was also hard to spot, as it has long, slender, grass-like 'pseudo-leaves' and the deep crimson flowers occur only in ones or twos.

At first sight, the runway appears bleak and bare, but study the cracks and crevices and the wild edges and you will find flowers after flowers. There were few small birds flitting around, the hedgerows seemed to be full of calling yellowhammers, and skylarks were trilling above us. Chiffchaffs and Whitethroats were calling from the scrubby areas.

There were several 'tents' of Small Eggar caterpillars on hawthorn and blackthorn in the hedge next to the runway. According to my book the larvae can live for up to seven years and the species is declining because of hedge trimming. One interesting question is how they make the tents? It must be a cooperative effort between the larvae. Interesting!

An arable field at the far end of the runway had a wonderful margin sown with many species of plants for pollinators and birds. No photograph can really do it justice but there must have been about twenty species flowering and it was quite a sight. Further on, behind a small copse there was a large clump of Dyer's Greenweed, related to Gorse and a member of the pea family. Since ancient times it has been used as a source of a yellow dye and used to be mixed with woad to give green cloth. Brenda Betteridge, who was recorder on 17 June, recorded no fewer than 114

different species of plant all told – quite a haul for an hour and a half’s walk!

*John Cobb + a few additions from Jill Bailey*

### **Early Summer Walk North of Woodstock, 29 and 30 June**

This was the Club's second COVID walk and was led on both occasions by Elaine Steane a Club member and well-known author. Five of us met on Monday 29 June and 4 of us on 30 June to repeat the walk. We started at the parking space outside the sewage works on the northern edge of Woodstock (SP449178). The walk took us to three very different habitats. The first was along a green lane bounded on one side by hedgerow trees such as Field Maple and Hazel and on the other by a small wood which sloped down to the river Glyme. We saw a good variety of common woodland plants including Black Horehound, which was a first for me, and an unusual Self-heal with white flowers.

After about a quarter of a mile we turned left into a meadow and then down a steep slope to the River Glyme. Along the riverbank we saw Marsh Woundwort and Brooklime and other common riverside plants. Retracing our steps, we re-entered the green lane for a while then turned right into a very large flower meadow. The recent good weather meant we didn't see the meadow at its best, as some of the flowers had bloomed earlier than usual. However, it was still very impressive and we saw lots of Broomrape and Marbled White butterflies on

Common Knapweed and other meadow flowers. The margin between the meadow and the hedgerow was also interesting. Elaine then took us through the adjoining wood into a small meadow with a good view looking north. From here she pointed out in the near distance a raised bank known as the agger on the Roman road Akeman Street.

It’s not often I learn about a song on a club walk, but I was intrigued when we were passing some bindweed to hear Elaine sing some of the words from the Michael Flanders and Donald Swann song 'Misalliance'. The lyrics are about a right-handed honeysuckle and a left-handed bindweed falling in love. The song is evocative of a simpler time of life.

*Jonathan Noel*

**From Elaine:** When Mary and I did a first recce, we saw 33+ Marbled White butterflies on a single Knapweed plant, also the right-handed Columbine and the left-handed Bindweed, which prompted the discussion of Flanders and Swann's song! On the later walk, Jonathan was able to pull it up on U-tube for us.

#### **Plants:**

Mugwort  
Black Horehound  
Rough Chervil  
Wood Avens  
Creeping Buttercup  
White Bryony  
Black Bryony  
St John’s-wort  
Agrimony  
Common Bird’s-foot Trefoil  
Hedge Bedstraw

Meadow Vetchling  
Weld  
Herb Robert  
Hedge Mustard  
Spurge Laurel  
White Campion  
Red Campion  
Lesser Burdock  
Greater Burdock  
Nipplewort  
Creeping Thistle  
Sowthistle

Ragwort  
Spindle tree  
Pyramidal Orchid  
Hedge Woundwort  
Himalayan Balsam  
Ground Ivy  
Selfheal  
Selfheal (white flowers, rare)  
Water Mint  
Marsh Woundwort  
Brooklime  
Hedge Bindweed

Great Willowherb  
Forget-me-not  
Black Medick  
Meadowsweet  
Wetted Thistle  
Clematis

**Butterflies:**

Marbled White  
Ringlet  
Small Skipper  
Meadow Brown  
Red Admiral  
Soldier beetles

Small White

**Moths and Damselflies:**

Burnett moth  
Banded Demoiselle

**Birds seen or heard:**

Blackcap or Garden Warbler  
Chaffinch  
Yellowhammer  
Chiffchaff  
Wren  
Sparrowhawk  
Long-tailed Tit

Swift  
Great Spotted Woodpecker

**Insects:**

Meadow Grasshopper  
Robin's Pincushion (gall)  
Lacewing  
Ladybird 6-spot

*Elaine Steane*

**Parsonage Moor walk – 11 & 18 August 2020**

Five members enjoyed a walk here with Peter Creed on 11 August, and Malcom Brownsword led four more on 18 August. The main attraction was the flowering of Grass of Parnassus, a species rare in southern England. The individual flowers seem to stand out like stars against the darkness of the boggy vegetation. Parsonage Moor is part of the Cothill Fen complex, which contains the largest area of alkaline fen in central England. Basically, it was formed when alkaline spring water burst through decayed vegetation closer to the surface. Consequently, there are three types of plant habitat: alkaline, neutral and acidic.

flowering Grass of Parnassus. There were also a couple of Narrow-leaved (or Pugsley's) Marsh Orchid still in flower. It was noticeable that as in the previous year, most of the wetter areas had dried out, due to drought earlier in the year, so there were not many dragonflies, although we did see a couple of females of the locally common Keeled Skimmer, a single male and also a female Southern Hawker. We also spotted two small clumps of Cotton Grass, an acid-loving species. Close to the wooden walkway we saw several of the water-loving Guelder Rose, as well as several basking Common Lizards and a couple of Speckled Wood butterflies.

The beautiful Bog Pimpernel seen in the 2019 July visit was no longer in flower for this visit, but this was compensated for by

*Malcolm Brownsword*

**Plants:**

Fen Bedstraw  
Wild Angelica  
Water Mint  
Square-stalked St. John's Wort  
Meadow Vetchling  
Stonewort  
Fen Pondweed  
Marsh Lousewort (over)  
Water Figwort  
Blunt-flowered Rush  
Hemp Agrimony

Agrimony  
Butterwort  
Lustrous Bog Moss (a sphagnum)  
Grass of Parnassus  
Marsh Valerian  
Tormentil  
Bog Pimpernel  
Quaking Grass  
Devil's-bit Scabious  
Guelder Rose  
Blackthorn

**Birds:**

Green Woodpecker

**Amphibians:**

Common Frog (small)  
Common Toad

**Insects:**

Long-winged Conehead Bush  
Cricket  
Lesser Marsh Grasshopper

Snail-killing Fly	Clubbed General Soldierfly	Common Darter (dragonfly)
Thick-headed Fly (a conopid)	Yellow-faced Solitary Bee	Keeled Skimmer (dragonfly)
White-zoned Furrow Bee (a solitary mining bee)	Hornet	
Tachinid fly	Brimstone Butterfly	<i>Jonathan Noel</i>

### Windrush River Valley walk 31 July 2020

There is a pleasant section of the Windrush River Valley that I like to think of as my own. I've seen quite a bit more of it this spring and summer because it's on my doorstep and has been a life-enhancing place in this 'Time of Covid'. I can choose to go for a quick hour's walk or pass through on my way to Crawley, Minster or Foxburrow Wood. It's become a better and better place to look for flowers in the last few years as the flood plain is no longer used for pasture in the dryer months.

At the end of July I was very pleased to accompany other members of the Field Club on the hunt for the best of the end of summer plants in flower. We started off at the top of Tower Hill, in Witney, and walked down through the large field towards Crawley. On several previous walks I have seen large numbers of Swifts and House Martins over an adjacent field where peas were growing but none on this occasion. We identified some trees and shrubs on the way and agreed it would be good to be better informed about trees.

We moved into the field that runs alongside the road leading to Crawley where the flowers

this year have been a joy. In the last few years the farmer has stopped ploughing a sloping section that's quite stony and the flowers have just got better and better each year. For me the best finds this year were the Lucerne, Sainfoin and Alsike Clover, all quite possibly crops from years gone by. But the Wild Carrot, Sun Spurge and Bird's-foot Trefoil were all in great number.

We moved on down to the flood plain and along the river and again things have improved over the last few years because the cows no longer damage the edge of the river. We were pleased to find the usual Meadowsweet, Angelica and Purple Loosestrife as well as Gypsywort and Skullcap. As all this took us longer than expected we moved homeward, passing Common Valerian on the way and finishing up with Soapwort growing near the Flo-Gas plant.

What a pleasant evening stroll, with several butterflies, grasshoppers, beetles and some lovely plants. Always a pleasure to spend time with Field Club friends.

<b>Plant species:</b>	Clematis	Common Vetch
Greater Burdock	Ivy	Hedge Mustard
Mugwort	Greater Knapweed	Musk Mallow
White Deadnettle	Yarrow	Lady's Bedstraw
Hogweed	Spear Thistle	St John's-wort
Prickly Lettuce	Pineappleweed	Wetted Thistle
Field Bindweed	Knotgrass	Bird's-foot Trefoil
Hedge Bindweed	Forget-me-not	Hedge Bedstraw
Ragwort	Dovesfoot (white & pink flowers)	Sun Spurge
Ground Ivy	Nipplewort	Wild Carrot

Creeping Cinquefoil  
Lucerne  
Black Medick  
Selfheal  
Sainfoin  
Alsike Clover  
Tufted Vetch  
Field Scabious  
Common Valerian  
Silverweed  
Prickly Sowthistle  
Goosefoot  
Soapwort  
Hemlock  
Scentless Mayweed  
Oak  
Field Maple  
Dogwood  
Hawthorn  
Hazel  
Walnut

Guelder Rose  
Elder  
Blackthorn  
Buddleia  
Alder  
Hornbeam  
Goat Willow

**Plant species – flood plain and riverside:**

Wild Angelica  
Meadowsweet  
Purple Loosestrife  
Hemp Agrimony  
Skullcap  
Gypsywort  
Water Forget-me-not  
Water Chickweed

**Butterflies:**  
Small Skipper

Meadow Brown  
Small Tortoiseshell  
Small White  
Peacock  
Speckled Wood  
Gatekeeper  
**Other Insects:**  
Southern Hawker dragonfly  
Meadow Grasshopper  
6-spot Ladybird  
Harvestmen  
Soldier Beetle  
Lesser Stag Beetle  
Leafhopper – *Cicadella viridis*  
A variety of bumblebees  
  
**Birds:**  
Wood.Pigeon  
Carrion Crow

Also galls on a leaf caused by *Psyllopsis fraxini*, a species of psyllid fly also known as jumping plant lice

*Maggie Collins*

**Windrush Valley walk – additional notes from Jonathan Noel**

On Saturday I did most of the walk again. I saw a few new species, including Scentless Mayweed and Southern Hawker dragonfly. There were a lot more bumblebees out yesterday. Near the end of the walk I saw a family group of about six adults and 4 children sitting down. They were from eastern

Europe and the two men in the group were cutting a large quantity of Pineappleweed. I spoke to them and they told me they were going to make a form of tea/chai with the plant and this was good for flu. I thought you might find this interesting.

*Jonathan Noel*

## OBITUARIES

### Avery Baines January 1926 – 2020



Avery joined the Field Club in 1970 and was actively involved on the Committee for several decades, organising the programmes, and especially the Club holidays. A keen bird-watcher and walker, she seldom missed a talk or a holiday. Born in Canada, she moved to England with her parents at the age of two. After an early job as a dental assistant, she trained as a teacher after WWII at Bletchley

Park, and spent the rest of her career teaching at Tower Hill School in Witney. Described as “an inspirational, clever and committed teacher”, she also taught her young charges bookbinding, printing and pottery. Club members will remember her calligraphic skills in the stylish place-cards she wrote for the Christmas dinner. She was also a talented silversmith, with her own AMB hallmark.

The Field Club was by no means her only leisure activity. As a Club member who moved to Witney some years ago told me, whatever she joined in Burford, there was Avery. She loved music and sang with the Burford Singers for many years, and she was involved in running the Concert and Theatre Club and Witney Music Society, a member of the WI, a Friend of Burford church, and at one time a regular cutter of the grass at Swinbrook church. Whatever her interests, she generously put her energies into. Even after a bad accident seriously impaired her mobility and gave her a great deal of pain, Avery continued to live life to the full. Now at rest in her beloved Swinbrook churchyard, she leaves behind many fond memories in the Field Club.

*Jill Bailey*

## Jo Dunn 1920 - 2020



(Anita) Jo Dunn will be remembered by some in the Field Club for her work with the Rare Plants Group (she was a founder member), and by older members for the wildflower walks she led in on the Ditchley Park estate and Daneway Banks. She was a highly skilled amateur field botanist and a meticulous recorder, contributing a stream of records to the Flora of Oxfordshire from 1967 until its publication in 1998, as well as the BSBI Monitoring Scheme and English Heritage, and contributed details of about 20 of the 400

scarce species in *Oxfordshire's Threatened Plants*, 2018. She was also a keen photographer, and some of her wildflower photographs were used in publications. Her interest in natural history was kindled while at Kingswood Grammar School in Bristol, where she was so taken by the writings of Henry Williamson that she struck up a correspondence with him, and was eventually invited to tea. After serving with the Land Army in the Lake District during WWII, Jo later worked in environmental jobs, including for a time running the Juniper Hall Field Studies Centre near Box Hill in Surrey.

Jo retired to Charlbury and became an enthusiastic member of the Wildflower Society. While walking in a green lane in 1983, she came across a colony of the rare Downy Woundwort, and subsequently organised the management of the site, which was designated a SSSI in 1988. This discovery led to a friendship with Rosemary FitzGerald, whose relatives had rights on this land. When Rosemary moved away from the area she asked Jo to take over recording the flora of the Ditchley estate, which led to the publication of *The Flora of Ditchley Park* in 1993. Jo had many articles and records published in both popular and learned publications. Another of her interests was the plant life in pollarded willows, and she recorded 74 species growing the crowns of some 400 pollards on the banks of the Evenlode and Windrush. We are grateful to Rosemary Fitzgerald for the use of this photograph of Jo.

*Jill Bailey*