
The Dorset Heath

Newsletter of the Dorset Flora Group



Bob Gibbons

A busy year

For those that attended the Dorset Flora Group AGM in November, it will come as no surprise that 2014 was an eventful year with a busy programme of field meetings and events, including another successful Dorset Wild Flower Week. VC9 (Dorset) Recorder, Robin Walls, reports on pages 2-4 on some of the highlights of the recording year, including an orchid species that has never been recorded previously in Great Britain.

The Dorset Flora group works closely with the National Trust in the county, and 2015 is the third year of the Diver Project, an ambitious project to replicate the detailed recording carried out by Cyril Diver in the 1930s at Studland. David Brown, Property Ecologist, on the National Trust Purbeck Estate and a member of the DFG committee, has written about its progress to date on pages 5-6

The main task, however, for the next few years is to systematically record the plants across the county, as part of our contribution to the BSBI 2020 *Atlas of Great Britain and Ireland*. This is an opportunity for

botanists of all levels to really explore the county and to make a lasting contribution to a nationally important atlas. Robin Walls is coordinating this work but we are very keen that as many people as possible take part in the project. To this end, we are holding a one-day event on 18th April at the Dorset Wildlife Trust's Kingcombe Centre, where people will be shown what has been achieved so far and how they can help. As well as training in the basics of survey techniques, there will be an opportunity to meet and talk about the project with fellow botanists. We are keen that people new to this type of recording come along and we will be setting up a mentoring system so that everyone has a chance to develop their skills over the season. There is more information on this important meeting on page 18.

There is also a full programme of events throughout the coming season (see pages 18-19). They are always great fun, with plenty to discover. Do come along.

Andrew Branson

Vice-county Recorder's Notes

Robin Walls

Recording for Atlas 2020

Most of our plant records are being submitted through Living Record, which is very convenient for me and enables me to see progress on a daily basis. At the Dorset Flora Group AGM, I showed the Living Record summary map at the hectad scale for plant records in the county. The dots show that only three hectads have more than 400 species recorded (the one at Ringwood is a result of the large amount of recording in the Hampshire part of this square). As I would hope that in many of the southern squares there should be around 1,000 species, we have a lot still to do for the BSBI Atlas. In fact, there will be more records in each square because some people send records to DERC in other ways. In addition, there are all the records from 2000 to about 2010, before Living Record became more generally used.

Some members have been assiduously working through the grid squares they have agreed to tackle, most notably Peter and Margaret Cramb in the far west and John Newbould on National Trust properties. Sandra Wright is making a good start in the Swanage/South Purbeck area and Laurence Taylor has covered a lot of the squares

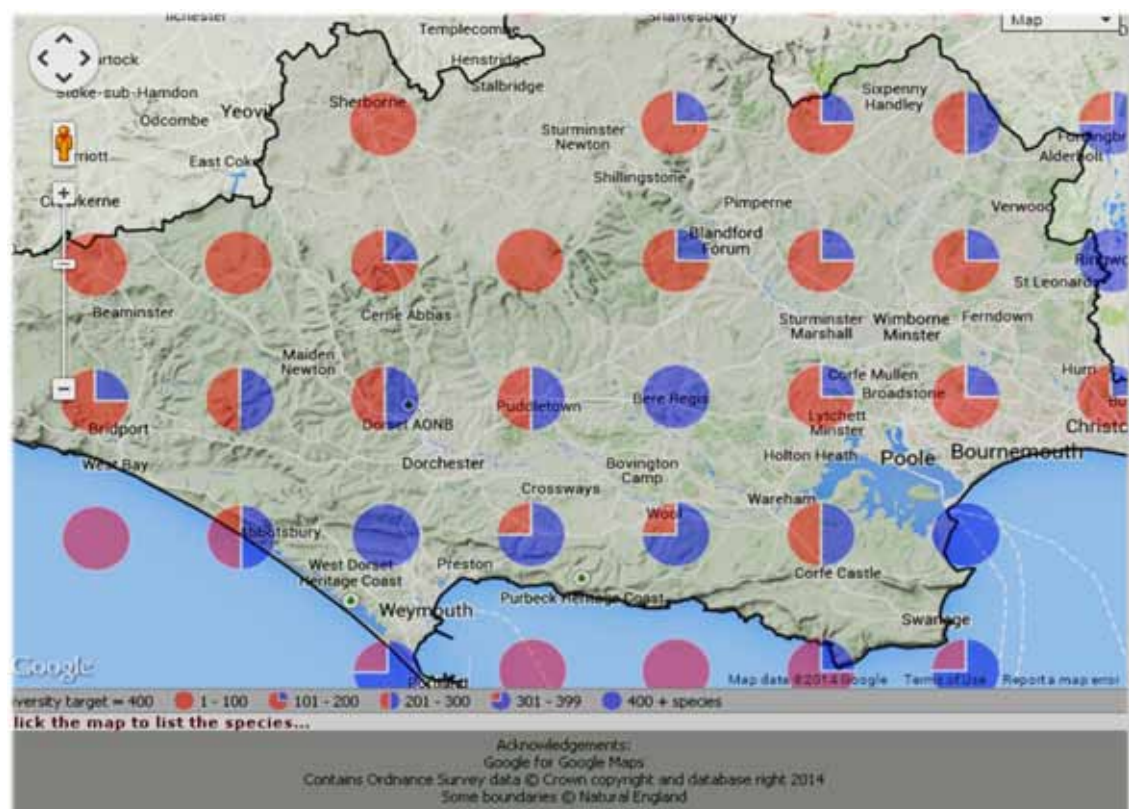
near his home. I am hoping more members will get out so that we end up with a good picture of the Dorset flora for the start of this century. In order to encourage more recorders, we are holding an introductory meeting at Kingcombe on 18th April. Please see page 18 for more details.

Two rare plant searches

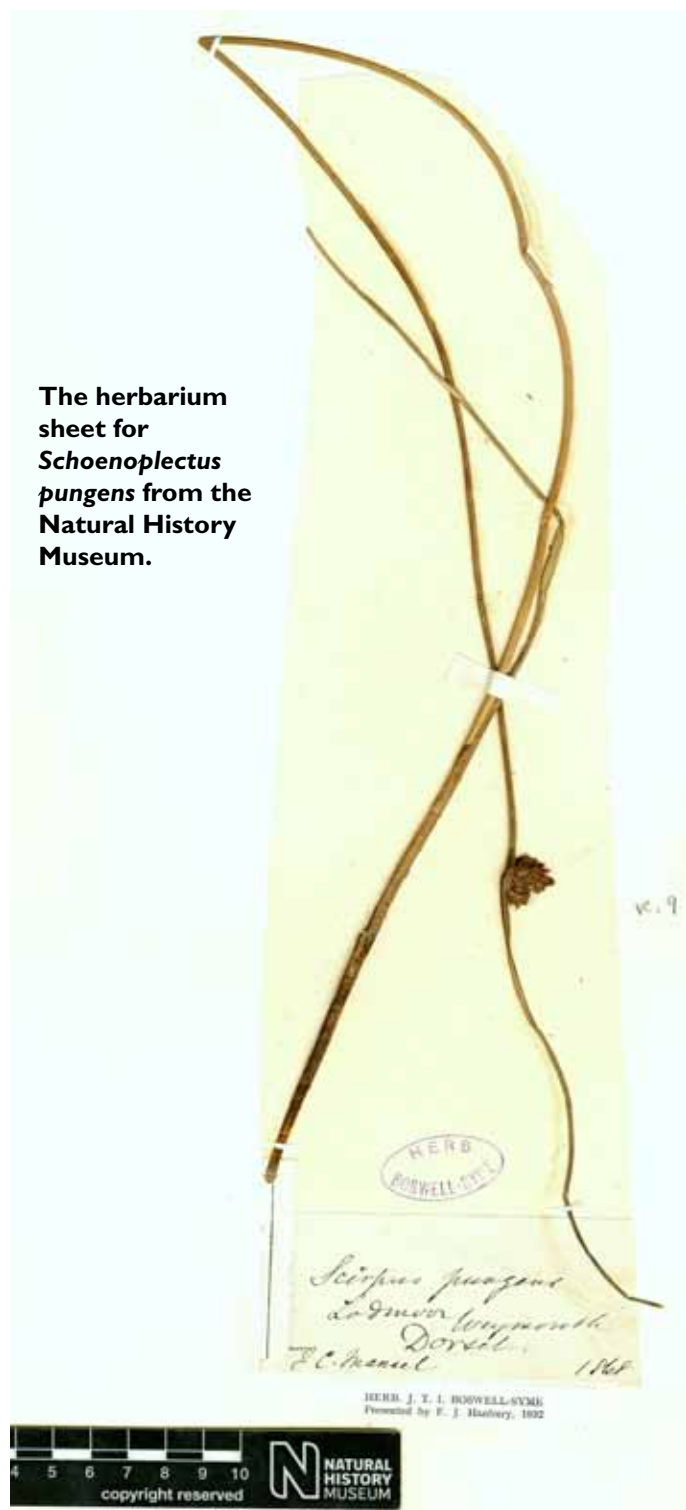
Last year I highlighted two species worth looking for: sharp club-rush *Schoenoplectus pungens* and a new species of club-rush *Bolboschoenus laticarpus*. The first of these is represented by a very old record from Lodmoor that derives from a sheet in the herbarium at the Natural History Museum of a specimen apparently collected by Mansel-Pleydell in 1868. A group of us gave Lodmoor as thorough a search as possible in late August, but without success. We knew it was a long shot after all that time.

Early in January this year, David Pearman emailed me to say that he had been looking through Syme's *English Botany* ed. 3 (1863-86), where there is an entry about *S. pungens*: 'possibly it occurs at Lodmoor, nr Weymouth, as specimens were sent to Mr I. C. Mansel with plants from

Map showing the number of vascular plant records for each hectad in Dorset, based on Living Record.



The herbarium sheet for *Schoenoplectus pungens* from the Natural History Museum.



that neighbourhood; but he hasn't been able to obtain satisfactory information as to whether the specimens of *S. pungens* were gathered in Dorsetshire or no'.

So it seems that Mansel-Pleydell was sent the specimen by another botanist and could not refind the plant. This explains why the record is not in his *Flora* and there is not a sheet in his herbarium. It makes me feel a little better about failing to find it. The specimen clearly stayed in the Syme herbarium and ended up in the Natural History Museum.

The other sedge is not an ancient record, but a newly recognised species that I was convinced would be the correct name for much of the sea club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus* recorded in the upper Stour and its tributaries. This was proved to be correct when Andrew Branson collected fruiting material from the River Stour at Hinton St Mary and he duly claims the prize for the first record for Dorset. We hope to find more sites this summer during the BSBI field trip (see page 14).

New records

Last year was notable for good records of orchids. Ian Andrews found a particularly attractive variety of bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* on the West Stafford bypass. Instead of the two insignificant, greenish petals of the ordinary form, in the variety *badensis* they are pink, giving the impression of a bee on a five-petalled flower.



The bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* var. *badensis* at West Stafford bypass. Mike Chalk

The West Stafford orchid was identified by Mike Chalk, who also gave me records of two other bee orchid varieties on Fontmell Down. However, this is completely overshadowed by the discovery he and his wife made amongst the early spider-orchids *Ophrys sphegodes* on the Purbeck coast. This was the sawfly orchid *O. tenthredinifera*, a completely new species for the British Isles. How it got here and whether it will survive are big questions, but it is a very exciting find.



The September issue of *BSBI News*, with the Dorset sawfly orchid on the cover.

Orchids were not the only new species for the vice-county, of course. At Sandbanks, David Calls found a blue-flowered plant, which was Russian lettuce *Lactuca tartarica*, the first record for the county. This species has been recorded from a handful of sites scattered in the British Isles, as far north as the Isle of Man. A second new record for the county is stinking fleabane *Dittrichia graveolens*, which was found at Studland by Ted Pratt. This North African weed seems to be spreading along main roads in Hampshire and we might expect to see more of it in the future. Ted also found another second record for the county: the hybrid rose *Rosa micrantha* x *rubiginosa*, whilst checking the roses along Ferry Road on Studland.

With the intensive surveying at Studland, it is not surprising that good finds are turning up. Much to his delight, early meadow-grass *Poa infirma* was found by Ted in several places after years hoping to spot it. We have also found more sites for this and the bulbous meadow-grass *P. bulbosa* around the peninsula. This is some compensation for having lost our other small annual grass, the early sand-grass *Mibora minima*.

Other new finds on the Studland peninsula are marsh fern *Thelypteris palustris*, found by Jim White during a bryophyte recording day, and sticky stork's-bill *Erodium lebelii*, spotted by David Leadbetter. The latter is probably the first good record since 1953.

Finally, whilst on a visit by the Carnivorous Plant Society at Spur Bog, Tim Bailey was certain one of the bladderworts there was not either of the common species (*Utricularia australis*, *U. minor*) and sent material to Germany for confirmation. It proved to be New Forest bladderwort *U. bremii*. This is a first for Dorset and the second site for Britain. I suspect its English name will now have to be changed! He also spotted an odd plant in the Nordic bladderwort *U. stygia* site on Middlebere Heath and this too proved to be a new record for us – intermediate bladderwort *Utricularia intermedia*, which is much more common in northern Britain. Further west, David Leadbetter found Ray's knotgrass *Polygonum oxyspermum* on the beach at Weymouth.

In this short note I have concentrated on the new records for the county. I have left out many of the scarce aliens and newly recognised subspecies that have been recorded because it is difficult to assess their significance. It is relatively recently that these are being sought by field botanists and it is often difficult to identify them. There are many other notable records and if I have not mentioned your find of the year, I apologise. Charles Whitworth and others have been refinding some of our rarities and it is always interesting to hear of these or see them cropping up in Living Record. If you would like a list of the scarce plants which need to be refound in your area, please contact me.

Recording days

Last year we successfully surveyed the new site on Winfrith Heath for the bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* (see page 12). Fortunately, we completed the main task before a torrential shower and a swift return to cars for lunch. The second species I had hoped to survey was the smooth cat's-ear *Hypochaeris glabra*, but this did not happen because of lack of time. I hope we can add this to the 2015 programme, together with some other species which need updating.

Robin Walls, 18th January 2015

Following the footsteps of change: The Cyril Diver Project at Studland

**David Brown, Property Ecologist,
National Trust Purbeck Estate**

This March marks the start of the third and final recording season of the Cyril Diver Project. This ambitious scheme, led by the National Trust but involving many partners and a good proportion of Dorset's most knowledgeable naturalists across almost all taxa, is taking a detailed ecological snapshot of the iconic South Haven Peninsula at Studland, and comparing its status today with that first recorded by pioneering ecologist Captain Cyril Diver in the 1930s.

As with many success stories, the project grew out of adversity. When the CEH Research Station at Winfrith closed, the Diver archive that occupied one of its rooms was left without a home. But the archive's contents – a herbarium, a 7,000-strong insect collection and over 80 boxes of maps, reports, field notes and photographs all relating to a 1932-1939 study of Studland – were worthy of a better future than deep storage in a warehouse or, as was apparently mooted at the time, a skip. Diver's work had, in its day, raised the bar in ecological recording. He had realised the importance of the interactions between plants and invertebrates and mapped them in minute detail. He had also

demonstrated Studland's ecological importance to the wider world at a time when it was under serious threat of urban development. Its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1954 and as a National Nature Reserve in 1961 may well have never happened without Diver's foresight.

Fortunately, the skip was avoided and the archive found its way to the National Trust, owners of Studland since 1982. Although the first priority was to catalogue and conserve the archive, a project soon evolved to attempt to replicate Diver's field survey, 80 years on, and see exactly how Studland had changed. Back in the 1930s, Diver had successfully persuaded numerous amateur and professional naturalists, as well as experts, to join forces with him as volunteers. Today, success of our project similarly depends on naturalists and volunteers of all abilities, of all specialisms, and from all organisations coming together to thoroughly investigate one of Dorset's most ecologically diverse and dynamic sites. Funded by the National Trust's Neptune Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund and as part of the Wild Purbeck Natural Improvement Area, it has been hailed as one of the country's most

Volunteers and David Brown (right) busy identifying bryophytes at Studland as part of the Diver Project.

John Newbould



ambitious –and successful- citizen-science projects to date.

Overseen by a steering group comprising professional, academic and voluntary conservation bodies (including the Dorset Flora Group in the persona of Robin Walls), the surveys are carried out entirely by volunteers. For many experienced recorders it is a chance to carry on doing what they always do, but on an internationally important site and as part of a project where their records will be analysed and used to further the understanding of coastal and heathland ecology. For many others it is a chance to learn, to get to know a site, to improve their field skills, perhaps to take part in a survey for the first time, and above all to enjoy being part of a team of volunteers doing something worthwhile.

In fact, from the National Trust's point of view, the learning aspect, and simply getting people involved, is just as important as any scientific outcomes we might achieve. We all know that specialist naturalists are a declining resource, and that their average age just gets higher. Projects such as the Diver Project offer a chance to do something about this. If we can bring new people into biological recording, and improve the skills of those who are already interested, then we are helping to build an invaluable long-term resource for Studland, Purbeck and beyond. To this end, underpinning the surveys has been a series of free workshops – 14 to date, with more planned for this year – which cover basic ecology and field identification techniques for different taxa. Perhaps more importantly, volunteers have weekly opportunities to learn through doing: regular survey groups for vascular plants, bryophytes, and diverse animal groups involve teaming beginners up with experts. And for those who are more serious about developing expertise in a particular taxa we run a bursary scheme – we are currently funding training, equipment and professional mentoring for five volunteers who are specialising in diptera, lichens, ants and butterflies, mammals and reptiles.

More hours have gone into botanical recording than into any other group. Cyril Diver divided the South Haven peninsula at Studland into around 90 different compartments, and the archives revealed historic plant species lists for all of them, as well as individual distribution maps for over 500 species. Over 2013 and 2014 we have repeated this through a regular Thursday botany group: most weeks around 8-12 people turn up, and capably (and patiently!)

led by Robin Walls, Ted Pratt and Jim White we have now visited most of the compartments twice. With 567 species at the most recent count we have surpassed Diver's total, but whether this represents a real increase in diversity or more diligent recording is hard to say! In the process there have been numerous new records for the site, from adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum* and marsh fern *Thelypteris palustris* to four-leaved allseed *Polycarpon tetraphyllum*. We have also been able to map the detailed distributions of some of the sites most important and vulnerable species, such as marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*, sea stock *Matthiola sinuata*, and six-stamened waterwort *Elatine hexandra*. Just as importantly, perhaps, we now have fairly accurate species lists for each compartment, and are starting to analyse how, and why, the different habitats across the peninsula have changed over the last 80 years.

The changes are, in some areas, dramatic. Parts of 'Southern Heath' that in the 1930s were open heath have become dense woodland; large tracts of sallow carr have sprung up in marshes that were recorded by Diver as purple moor-grass *Molinia* and bog-myrtle *Myrica* swamp. Understanding the reasons for the changes, whether dramatic changes in habitat type, or the subtle losses, gains or changes in abundance of individual species, is our challenge for the final year. Many of these changes are the result of human activity, from the loss of grazing cattle to the increase in deer, the arrival of non-native plants to the massive increase in visitor pressure, as well as the legacy of wartime training activities. Perhaps most significant, however, are the ongoing forces of nature, as ecological succession has turned dune grassland to dune heath, dune heath to scrub, and marsh to woodland. At the same time, an entirely new dune ridge and dune slack has formed since 1930, creating new early succession habitats. Water levels in Little Sea and the marshes have continued to rise, while salinity levels appear to have dropped.

Studland is a truly dynamic site, and trying to understand exactly how and why it is changing is a challenge that is gripping almost everybody who has become involved in the Cyril Diver Project.

Regular botany surveys will begin again in March 2015, normally on a Thursday. If you want to get involved or find out more, please contact Michelle Brown, Cyril Diver project officer, on michelle.brown1@nationaltrust.org.uk.

Hambleton Hill National Nature Reserve

John Newbould

The acquisition in April 2014 of the 50ha hill fort by the National Trust, which is the majority of the Hambleton Hill NNR, started a programme of baseline recording by volunteers from both Dorset Flora Group and Dorset Invertebrate Recording Group, together with the Trust's professional bio-survey team, to inform future management of the site. This early Neolithic hill fort has features from the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron ages, and lies in a valley to the east of the river Stour, complementing the nearby Trust sites at Hod Hill, Badbury Rings, Ringmoor and Turnworth, together with the chalk downland to the north of Fontmell Down, Compton Down and Melbury Down, also owned by the Trust.

The hill fort is open access, but there is limited parking. A good place is in a layby by Markstone Cottages (ST8391 1214) then walk towards Child Okeford, turning up a track and ignoring a DCC footpath sign. This takes you to the steep western side of the chalk downland. On reaching the summit at 192m, there are fine views across the Blackmore Vale.

On our initial visit, we were treated to red kite hawking overhead and on the lower slopes. Skylark has bred here in 2014 and linnets and breeding yellowhammer are usually seen in the scrub on the fort margins. Twenty-nine species of butterfly have been recorded on the hill fort since the millennium,

of which 26 were seen in 2014, with the surprising omission of peacock and comma. In recent years, there have been rare sightings of marsh fritillary, whose chalk downland stronghold is the nearby Hod Hill, and small blue. Devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* is present on the northern ramparts and the northern plateau, so marsh fritillary should be present. The small blue is a different story as the caterpillar feeds on the anthers and seed of kidney vetch, which was not seen during our surveys. Despite strong winds, we have recorded both the IUCN-rated Vulnerable dingy and grizzled skippers.

We have not undertaken any night-time moth trapping but a number of daytime flying moths have been recorded, including the Notable B chalk carpet. During an August visit, five species of orthoptera were noted, including striped-winged grasshopper and great-green bush-cricket at one of its most northern Dorset locations.

The many chalk grassland flowers provide an excellent source for pollinators, in an area where the lowlands are mainly dairy and arable farming. There are small areas of meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* seen on the eastern ramparts during its short flowering season in May, and large areas of quaking grass *Briza media*, salad-burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*, yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, small scabious

View northwards across the ramparts at Hambleton Hill NNR. Andrew Branson





Meadow saxifrage. John Newbould

Scabiosa columbaria, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus* and common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, typical of the chalk grassland. Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* is rare but has the gall of the picture-winged fly *Upophora spoilata*. Horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* provides a food plant for both the chalkhill blue and adonis blue butterflies. Early gentian *Gentianella anglica* is rare on the north plateau. Visitors in late August and early September can see both autumn gentian *G. amarella* and autumn lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* in the short grassland. Dwarf sedge *Carex humilis* is quite scarce here, unlike nearby Hod Hill. As well as kidney vetch, we did not find bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum*.

The lower eastern slope is quite wooded, with scrub causing problems in places. There are a number of quite old ash trees, including some fallen timber being left to rot. This fallen timber is important for wood-decay species, including the fungi *Botryobasidium auren* and *Henningsomyces candidus*. The area does form an excellent area of wood pasture and really could do with an invertebrate survey. Here, an area of dogwood is causing problems, with runners extending the area despite some quite extensive scrub 'bashing'.

During November, the National Trust commissioned Bryan Edwards of the Dorset Environmental Records Centre to undertake a bryological and lichen survey, of the northern and eastern slopes, which are more wooded. He recorded 53 species of mosses and liverworts. We have also been advised that some of the smaller acrocarps are best identified with mature



Clearing scrub at Hambledon Hill. John Newbould

sporophytes and Wessex Bryology Group will be surveying again on 19th April 2015. Bryan also provided a list of fungi, including three waxcaps on the chalk turf, including *Hygrocybe colemanniana*, *H. conica* and *H. virginea* var. *fuscescens*.

In early October, Peter Hatherley reported that he had seen juniper *Juniperus communis* (one bush had fruit) in a shelterbelt to the south of the National Trust-owned land. Laurence Taylor and I went to investigate and certainly saw four juniper bushes, together with two bushes of box *Buxus sempervirens*, in a mixed densely wooded area with a few alien species. The whole impression was of a wooded area possibly ten years old, with four tall junipers. We have been unable to find any history of how this area came into existence.

For many years, an organic farmer has grazed the hill fort, which precluded the chemical treatment of scrub. This agreement ends in April 2015 and a new local non-organic farmer will be grazing with White Parks and sheep. The main priority of the ranger team for the next 18 months is scrub control, which due to the steep slopes will have to be done by hand.

The information provided by volunteers from the Dorset Flora Group and Dorset Invertebrate Group has been used to provide an initial Biological Conservation Assessment, which the National Trust aims to provide for all its properties. On behalf of the National Trust, I should like to thank all volunteers who have contributed.

John Newbould (volunteer ecologist NT West Dorset team)

Field meeting reports 2014

26th April 2014, Filcombe Wood and St Gabriel's Wood

Leader and report John Newbould

Filcombe Wood (Chideock parish)

Five members joined Rowan Thompson, a National Trust ranger, to explore these woods. Filcombe Wood was first mentioned in 1567 (DRO D/WCH M44) when Walter Stray dug a ditch there. It is clearly an ancient woodland site and we recorded nine plants indicative of Dorset ancient woodlands.

The wood was clear felled in 1948 with subsequent re-planting and natural growth. A spring issues in the field to the south-east of the wood. Here, alder *Alnus glutinosa* (often having large coppice stools) is found on the higher south-eastern slope, with opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* and ransoms *Allium ursinum*, forming an NVC W6d community with ash, elder *Sambucus nigra* and downy birch *Betula pubescens* merging with a small area of NVC W5c *Alnus glutinosa* – *Carex paniculata* (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* subcommunity) [Rackham 1991] in the valley bottom, where grey willow *Salix cinerea* is found adjacent to the stream, together with some occasional tussocks of greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata* (SY40779269) and hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*. Elsewhere in drier parts of the wood, NVC type appears to be W8(c) and (f) ash-field maple-dog's mercury with (c) tufted hair-grass and (f) ransoms sub-communities. Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* is occasional and a few stands of old gorse *Ulex europaeus* are seen on drier ground, with hazel *Corylus avellana* and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*. Ransoms (in the wettest places), bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* or pendulous sedge dominate the wood floor, which slopes north-westwards, draining into St Gabriel's Water. In recent times, various conifers, including Norway Spruce *Picea abies*, have been added to this wood. Hard fern *Blechnum spicant* and the occasional foxglove *Digitalis purpurea* indicate the acid nature of the soil. There are areas of wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosa*. Wood sedge *C. sylvatica*, wood speedwell *Veronica montana*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, wild strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* and herb-Robert *Geranium robertianum* are also in the wood.

The warm, wet, well-lit trees on the eastern and southern boundaries are rich in epiphytes, mainly lichens, but also scattered through the twigs are a few liverworts. The liverwort *Cololejeunea minutissima* is found mainly near the

south and west coasts, and was seen on the smooth bark of ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. The lichen *Physcia leptalea* is a local species of nutrient-enriched trees in well-lit situations, again mainly on the south and west coast. *Usnea articulata* (IUCN cat NT with IR in Britain) is a locally common species in the extreme south-west, where it festoons tree canopies and well-lit hedges. It is not fertile in Britain and is probably distributed by wind. It is one of the most SO₂ sensitive species known. In Filcombe Wood there were two examples on a single branch of hornbeam.

The northern boundary is a hedge bank with hornbeam, hazel, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and pedunculate oak.

The woodland was alive with bird song. Marjorie Waters provided a list of 20 species, including song thrush, two male blackcaps, chiffchaff (four singing males), two noisy nuthatches, three goldcrests and coal tit. With a strong wind and heavy showers, there were few insects about. We saw a single speckled wood and the micro-moth associated with dead wood *Nemorpha degeerella*.

St Gabriel's Wood (Stanton St Gabriel's parish)

This adjacent wood is effectively separated from Filcombe Wood by a parish boundary bank around 1m high, which contains a number of large coppiced ash stools. This boundary has been extant since 1086, with the King's land to the east in Chideock and his half brother holding the stoney ground (from Stanton) to the west. Papworth, in the National Trust's archaeological report, describes St Gabriel's Wood as ancient woodland sold to the Forestry Commission in 1948. He explains that with the farms of the parish being small and changing hands frequently through the Middle Ages, there is little archival evidence of land use. The wood stands below field 80 and slopes northwards, forming a valley side to St Gabriel's Water. An area to the north around Filcombe Cottage is on a mound dominated by beech-bramble (NVC type W14). Both rhododendron *R. ponticum* and cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* form part of the under-storey here.

A recent forest track has been constructed through both woods (not using hard materials), two gullies have been culverted and earthbanks built to carry the track over the gullies.

The north-facing slope of St Gabriel's Wood is more acid, with pedunculate oak-silver birch and bramble (NVC type W10). Ash is common, along with sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*. There is a good amount of rotten fallen timber. There are many small hollies in the bluebell patches,

which require removing. Both dog's mercury and wood anemone are scarce. Alder is a feature of the streamside at the northern boundary. Wet patches are indicated either by tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage or extensive areas of ransoms. Foxglove, wood spurge, primrose, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, dog's mercury and important areas of bluebell and pendulous sedge are present.

6th May 2014 Westhay Farm (St Gabriel's parish)

Leader and report John Newbould

The objective of this survey was to continue to monitor the progress of green-winged orchid *Anacamptis (Orchis) morio* started in 2008, coupled with a public guided walk to demonstrate the successful management of the hay-meadows at Westhay Farm. Management here is to cut the meadows for hay after flowers have seeded, in late July, followed by aftermath grazing until the new year when they are closed up and the cycle starts again.

Four fields are mainly involved, three of which are accessible by public footpath. With the survey undertaken on a bank holiday with many walkers using the coastal path, we confined our attentions to the footpaths in order not to encourage people to wander in the hay crop, and used binoculars to examine the field. In the field under Stonebarrow Hill adjacent to the coastal footpath, we estimated that there were around 1,500 flowering spikes of green-winged orchid, mainly in shorter grassland, accompanied by yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and many bulbous buttercups *Ranunculus bulbosus*. There were just 80 flowering spikes here in 2008. The most significant field, known as Sydling Close, is a seven-acre field described on the 1840 Tithe

Visitors admiring Westhay's green-winged orchids.

John Newbould



map as arable lost to wood, whilst the 1932 survey by local school children in the Dudley Stamp series described it as a meadow. A local orchid specialist, David Leigh, described the numbers present as outstanding, saying that if there were just one flowering spike per square yard there would have been over 30,000 flowering spikes in the meadow. Whilst clearly many square yards contained none, others had up to 30 flowering spikes. Colour forms ranged from white, showing the green veins on the flowers quite clearly, through pink to deep purple.

With so many hay meadows no longer managed in a traditional way today, it is pleasing to report that co-operation between the National Trust's West Dorset team and the tenant farmer is leading to a successful outcome for an orchid classified as IUCN Near Threatened in Great Britain but Vulnerable in England (Stroth *et al.* 2014) and declining in both numbers of sites and flowering spikes present across Britain (Preston *et al.* 2002).

Wednesday 7th May 2014 Townsend Dorset Wildlife Trust Reserve (Swanage parish)

Rare Plant Recording visit

Leader and report Amber Rosenthal, DWT Reserves Officer

The aim of the visit was to update records for a number of rarities and to attempt to map their current distribution. Six members and two of the DWT area wardens turned out to accompany the leaders Ted Pratt and Amber Rosenthal, with the wardens being able to update the group on the new phase of habitat management now underway at the site. Highlights of the day included a stunning display of the main target species, hairy-fruited cornsalad *Valerianella eriocarpa*, which was well in flower, but yet to form seeds, in its previously known location. A second, new, location within the site was also found, though a third possible location was later discounted following examination of the seed by Ted on a return visit which revealed the plants to be the commoner keeled-fruited cornsalad *V. carinata*. Dwarf mouse-ear *Cerastium pumilium* proved to be trickier to track down, being interspersed with the similar sea mouse-ear *C. diffusum* in many cases, but in the end several locations were re-confirmed, with some new patches added to the distribution map.

Only one diminutive early gentian *Gentianella anglica* was found during the visit. It later proved to be a poor year for them at both of the DWT sites, perhaps relating to the prolonged wet winter and cool, early spring. Counts of early spider-orchid *Orphys sphegodes* had already been undertaken at the site, though one additional spike was found during the group visit, bringing the total to 228 plants for the year. Other notable species included bastard-



DFG rare plant recording at Townsend; the team getting sore knees on 'Orchid Bastion'. Neil Gibson, DWT.

toadflax *Thesium humifusum*, or the more genteel sounding 'Stars-in-grass', and a good number of common twayblade, *Neottia (Listera) ovata* on 'Twayblade bank'. Many thanks from DWT to those who contributed to the day and in particular to Ted Pratt, whose knowledge of the two primary target species was greatly appreciated.

11th June 2014 Bindon Hill and Lulworth Cove (West Lulworth parish) Leader and report John Newbould with recording assistance by Robin Walls

Six members assembled at the West Lulworth parish church. We initially surveyed the churchyard, which frustratingly is well managed allowing us to record only around the churchyard monuments. Of note was meadow clary *Salvia verbenaca* – a plant we were to discover later is abundant on the eastern grass verge in the village. There was a small number of ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. Otherwise, little had changed since our visit in July 2013.

Our next recording area was the northern slopes of Bindon Hill, south of Bindon Road. The water trough contained the same stonewort *Chara vulgaris*, which has been present for at least ten years. The lower slopes are dominated by glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, with many herbs, including clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata*, but ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* was quite scarce. There were plenty of pyramidal orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis* in flower, whilst generally the herbs were typical of chalk grassland. However, we did find slender St John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum*, which is rare on the chalk. The Weld estate had removed gorse *Ulex europaeus* since our last visit. There were many Lulworth skippers *Thymelicus acteon*, a few Adonis blue *Polyommatus bellargus* and a few small heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*, which seem to have

recovered from poor years in 2012-13. We also noted a few of the birds typical of gorse scrub, including linnet, yellowhammer and whitethroat.

Climbing to the ridge and Bindon Hill Fort, the soil become more sandy with plants such as dove's-foot cranesbill *Geranium molle* and the now IUCN-rated Vulnerable dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*. Careful searching of the plant revealed leaf mines of the micro-moth *Leucoptera laburnella* forma *wallesella*, which was highlighted by Dr Phil Sterling in his talk at the Flora Group 2013 AGM. I was also pleased to re-find the mite gall *Aceria rosalia* on common rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* at the only location I know for this gall. Bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* was in flower here together with small areas of mouse-eared hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, common thyme *Thymus polytrichus* and quaking grass *Briza media*.

The group descending the steep path to Lulworth Cove. John Newbould



The morning session covered the 1km square SY8280, whilst in the afternoon we descended down the steep path to the cove recording in square SY8279 to the south-east corner of Lulworth Cove. Here, we were into different habitats, with rather too much tor-grass *Brachypodium rupestre* and it was certainly not as species-rich in chalk grassland plants. There were a number of coastal plants, including rock samphire *Crithmum maritimum* and sea beet *Beta vulgaris*, but surprisingly none of the seaside plantains. There were quite a few wet flushes where we saw an occasional southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and a large patch of giant horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*. We do not often record colt's-foot *Tussilago farfara* in Dorset but here exposed clay provided a good habitat. There were beds of common reed *Phragmites australis* and bulrush *Typha latifolia*. Robin Walls discovered a plant of common cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* with the cigar-shaped gall in the stem of the cynipid wasp *Phanacis hypochoeridis*, which I rarely see.

19th July 2014 Bog orchid count, Winfrith Heath.

Leader Laurence Taylor, report Robin Walls

Seven of us met at 10.30 on a warm, overcast day that promised thunder storms, which it delivered at the end of the morning! We counted 18 flowering spikes of bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* (IUCN Vulnerable in England) in the area south of the Tadnoll road, where Laurence Taylor had found them last year. We then scoured the whole mire without finding more. We did spot some petty whin *Genista anglica* in flower to lighten the increasing rain. On the way back to the cars for lunch, we searched for marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris* at an old, six-figure grid reference but without success.

After lunch the shower seemed to be passing and four of us elected to stay and have a look for bog orchid on the west side of the main mire north of the road. This was not successful and, although the habitat looked suitable, we did not find the brown beaked-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca* or marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* either. By now, we were drying out and the day was getting very warm so we went to see the brown beaked-sedge at the well-established site in Whitcombe Vale.

As a final foray, we had a go at finding a two-year-old record of heath pearlwort *Sagina subulata* and mossy stonecrop *Crassula tillaea* near the north end of the main track running towards Tadnoll. The stonecrop was missing, but we found the pearlwort with other scarce species: chaffweed *Anagallis minima*, bristle clubrush *Isolepis setacea*, allseed *Radiola linoides* and dodder *Cuscuta epithymum*.

On such a warm, humid afternoon, it is not surprising that

we saw several species of dragonfly, moth and butterfly, notably silver-studded blue at two sites. We also found a young toad and immature grasshoppers.

30th June 2014 Yellow Vetchling Survey at Durlston Country Park (Swanage parish)

Leader and report Rev. E.A. Pratt

Eight of us took part in this yellow vetchling *Lathyrus aphaca* survey. Anita Diaz was unwell and so was not able to bring students from Bournemouth University, so we only covered about 60% of the possible areas. Anita would like to repeat the meeting next year, which will enable us to complete the survey. The species was found in or near the edges of eight fields in which it had been recorded before – Fields 2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 15, 17 and 34. It was also found in three fields in which I had not recorded it previously – Fields 4, 8 and 12. No plants were found in Fields 1, 3, 11, 13 and 14.

Field 6 was being grazed. Fields 15A, 16, 16A, 18, 18A, 19, 20 were also not searched. Nor were the centre of Field 5 and most of Field 34, in both of which several plants have been found before. Only the south end of Field 17 was searched. The three largest populations were on the north edge of Field 4, the west half of the south edge of Field 8, and in the south end of Field 17. A map has been compiled.

20th July 2014 Yellow vetchling and pale flax seed collecting at Durlston Country Park

Leader and report Rev. E.A. Pratt

Three of us took part. We spent two hours collecting in the south end of Field 17. There was no problem in keeping to the Kew rule of taking not more than 20% of the seed available, because both species ripen seed over several weeks and only a low proportion of seeds on any one plant were ripe.

Yellow vetchling seedpods, which are brown and ripe can be opened by pressing firmly on their outer end. About 15% contained an unknown larva, which was eating the seeds. About 10% had seeds, which were small and lacked the healthy glossy black coat of good seeds. About 5% had seeds with a black and green pattern, which, though attractive, might be an indicator of disease. We collected only from the remaining 70% of good pods. Each contained from three to six seeds.

There were no observable problems of larva or disease in the pale flax *Linum bienne* seedheads. But the seeds were so embedded in the seedcases that we picked the whole seedheads. These opened in a few hours on a windowsill in the sun, and so left Kew with little problem in separating out the glossy pale brown seeds. Kew wrote, 'Many thanks

to the Dorset Flora Group for making collections from the above species.”

16th August 2014 Eggardon Hill National Trust (Arkerswell parish) Leader and report John Newbould

This small National Trust property is situated on a south-west facing slope with good views of the Dorset coast looking towards Thorncombe Beacon and Golden Cap. A small party of six people walked from the cross roads to the chalk grassland of the hill fort. Much of the grassland is on thin soils providing a good habitat for many chalk grassland species of plants and mosses. On a preliminary survey at the beginning of July, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsia* covered much of the hill slopes, but at the time of our visit the main interest was autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*, which was quite prolific in the quaking grass *Briza media* dominated grassland. Carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris* and lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* were quite scarce, but small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorbia* were plentiful. Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* had the gall of the picture-winged fly *Uphoria spoilata*, whilst a single ragwort *Senecio* plant had what appeared to have fascination but was the eriophyoid gall *Aceria rhodiolae*, which I had not seen before.



The mystery Eryngium at Eggardon Hill. John Newbould

We did leave one botanical puzzle behind. We found two plants of the family *Eryngium* growing in the chalk grassland. They were some 450mm high and were definitely not sea holly *E. maritimum*, which may be found on Chesil

beach east of West Bexington. Pictures were taken, email correspondence was pursued, garden plant books consulted along with the internet, but we could not put a name to our find.

We were also rewarded with eight wheatears starting their autumn passage.

13th September 2014 Hawkchurch parish Leader and report John Newbould

The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland are proposing an updated *Plant Atlas* in 2020, with a last recording year of 2019. For a variety of reasons, we have not really pursued this project in depth but this meeting was arranged to make a start in the north-west of Vice County 9, Dorset, although the parish is in the administrative county of Devon.

Five members of the Dorset Flora Group crept across the border, parking in Hawkchurch and undertaking a circular walk covering three 1km squares, ST3400, ST3401 and ST3501. The habitats were varied, including the churchyard, village walls, hedges, some woodland, waste ground, arable land mostly planted with maize, a small stretch in Thorncombe parish (Dorset) alongside the Blackwater River; an area of cleared woodland with a pond, which was surprisingly acid, and waste ground. None of this sounded that interesting, but 335 records produced a list of 203 plant species in the three 1km squares (ST3400 had 121 records; ST3501 had 85 records and ST3401 had 129 records).

Surprises included: green-ribbed sedge *Carex binervis*, pill sedge *C. pilulifera* and remote sedge *C. remota*, swine-cress *Coronopus didymus* and lesser swine-cress *C. squamatus* as cornfield weeds with the grass cockspur *Echinochloa crus-galii* growing on the edge of maize fields. Plicate sweet-grass *Glyceria notata* and small sweet-grass *G. declinata* were rare in wet places.

Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* on the River Blackwater had the under-recorded leaf mine *Phytoliriomyza melampyga*, whilst shepherd's purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris* had the fungal gall *Albugo candida*.

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Dorset Wild Flower Week reports 2014

Powerstock Common 24th May

Some 24 hardy souls braved the walk with Jim White, on a day that started with torrential downpours, and throughout our two-hour stroll we had consistent steady rain. We concentrated on two main grassland types – acid heathy grassland and the more base-rich turf of the deep cutting of the former Bridport railway-line. Despite the uncomfortable weather we did get to see a good range of Powerstock's grassland delights.

Flowers seen in the heathy turf, restored by DWT over the past couple of decades from conifer plantations, included tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, bugle *Ajuga reptans* and bitter-vetch *Lathyrus linifolius* among a carpet of meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea* and glaucous sedge *C. flacca*. Other more local sedges seen in this damp acid grassland were flea sedge *C. pulicaris*, pale sedge *C. pallescens* and tawny sedge *C. hostiana*. Common spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* were frequent and there were several large stands of heath spotted-orchids *D. maculata*. The leaves of plants that will flower later – such as betony *Betonica officinalis*, saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* – made up a good proportion of this very herb-rich turf. When well grazed, as this site is, it is revealing how rich purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* turf can be. There is fresh young growth of heather *Calluna vulgaris* and we saw too a few bushes of petty whin *Genista anglica*.

The massive, terraced railway cutting, though still in Fullers Earth Clay, must reach a more base-rich zone as here the flora includes salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule* and yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, in a turf with much red fescue *Festuca rubra* and meadow oat-grass *Avenula pratensis* all much more typical of calcareous soils. The south-facing slopes have common rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* and thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, too, and we could not miss the spiny rosette of woolly thistle *Cirsium eriophorum* and some very fine spikes of greater butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*.

Jim White

Ballard Down 24th May

The Wessex Water part of the Down at its west end is so rich in species that we only walked few hundred metres at the foot of it. This was just as well, as the leader (Edward Pratt) had a back problem which made walking and standing difficult. A nice colony of gromwell *Lithospermum officinale* was the highlight, among a host of more colourful species such as horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*,

common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, bladder campion *Silene vulgaris*, common rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, field madder *Sherardia arvensis*, and mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*. Just nine folk took part. The rain held off until the walk was over.

Edward Pratt

Corfe Charity Meadows 25th May

Sadly, this had to be cancelled as the leader Edward Pratt's back was too bad for him to walk the distance.

Badbury Rings 26th May

Attendance was 19. Lots of greater butterfly-orchids *Platanthera chlorantha*, common-spotted orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and twayblades *Listera ovata*, and other chalkland species. We found the elusive adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, and saw small and common blues, an early burnet companion and a yellow shell. A bloody-nosed beetle obliged, and none of the forecast showers occurred.

David & Margaret Godfrey

Winfrith Nature Reserve 26th May

A total of 23 people attended the first of my walks which was a great surprise after the last occasion when no one turned up! The weather was good.

Highlights were a good showing of royal fern *Osmunda regalis*, small-flowered buttercup *Ranunculus parviflorus* (found by Robin Walls), changing forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor*, all-seed *Radiola linoides* and a fine display of pillwort *Pilularia globulifera* at the end, proudly showing their 'pills'. While looking at the pillwort, a hobby flew over and was around for about an hour which meant the walk lasted a lot longer than anticipated. In all, 114 species were recorded.

Laurence Taylor

North Holes Bay Shore 27th May

We had 12 arrive for the walk. We admired the Russian comfrey *Symphytum x uplandicum* in the country park, and apologised for the philistines who, as usual, had strimmed the Park's parsley water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachendalii* to invisibility (and death?). Leaving the Park, there was a lovely sward on the shore of sea club-rush *Bulboscheonus maritimus* in flower. From the woodland strip (full of pignut *Conopodium majus*, greater stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, etc) we ventured out on the saltmarsh, finding much sea arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima* in flower, and sea plantain, *Plantago maritima*, sea milkwort *Glaux maritima*, thrift *Armeria maritima*, sea-purslane *Atriplex*

portulacoides, saltmarsh rush *Juncus gerardii*, *Spartina*, etc. At Marshes End there was a wonderful show of common wildflowers to identify in the small meadows by the cycle track. We stopped by the new 'Scirpoides Henge', erected after the winter storm erosion, to prevent this rare species (round-headed clubrush *Scirpoides holoschoenus*) from being mown, and we admired its flowers, with a backdrop of black mustard *Brassica nigra*. We hope they never cut the mustard! At the Outfall mini-meadow was our first bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*; more were found as we turned south for more meadows. An exciting find was an unfamiliar clover – it turned out to be our first ever knotted clover *Trifolium striatum*, a reward for persuading Poole Council to mow the bay-side meadows only in September.

David & Margaret Godfrey

Higher Hyde Heath 27th May

A total of 12 people turned up for this walk. We set off in the dry, although rain was forecast for later. It started raining after about ten minutes and carried on more or less for the next three hours.

There was a good showing of southern marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, pale butterworts *Pinguicula lusitanica* (new location for this site) and skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* which was just coming into flower. There was no sign of the frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*, which is a bit worrying. In all, 103 species were recorded.

We all got very wet, and as no one left early, even though they were given the option, all must have enjoyed themselves, which was gratifying. One lady who had been with us on the previous day managed to point out a star sedge *Carex echinata* which the leader had been trying to find!

Laurence Taylor

Corfe Common 28th May

Nine attended on a rather gloomy morning that had the threat of rain but which happily remained largely dry.

We made a tour of part of the west common at Corfe, with its (unique in Dorset) expanse of well-grazed acid grassland grading into several base-rich mires that emerge from the spring-line around the heathy ridge. The whole common is on Wealden Clays, but well-drained sandy soils and very wet, flushed clays are present in close proximity, giving great floristic variety.

The heathy turf is very herb-rich, and flowers seen here included tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, heath speedwell *Veronica officinalis*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, bugle *Ajuga reptans* and bitter-vetch *Lathyrus linifolius*, among a carpet of rosettes of

plants that will flower later, such as betony *Betonica officinalis*, saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisia pratensis*. Heath spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* were abundant in the turf, but only a few were in full flower, and there were numerous early marsh-orchids *D. incarnata*, many showing spotted leaves, indicating probable hybrid origin. Many sedges are typical of this turf, and in all we saw ten species, including flea *C. pulicaris*, spring *C. caryophylla*, tawny *C. hostiana* and abundant carnation sedge *C. panicea*. The extensive patches of chamomile *Chamaemelum nobile* are a real feature of parts of this traditionally grazed grassland: heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* is also frequent.

We had time only to look in any detail at one of the flushes and here saw a fen-type 'brown-moss' margin, with ragged-Robin, *Silene flos-cuculi*, water mint *Mentha aquatica* and the leaves of marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* and marsh lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, around a raised dome of more acid mire with *Sphagnum* mosses. The mire had common cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, round-leaved sundew, *Drosera rotundifolia*, pale butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica* and just-about-to-flower bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*. We found good stands of adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum* in several places, both in typical herb-rich turf and, with unusually large plants, along the verge of the little road across the common to Blashenwell.

Jim White

Adder's-tongue fern. John Newbould



Kingcombe Meadows 28th May

Nick Gray and I enjoyed immensely the walk we led. We had 27 attendees. We took a good ramble through the meadows at Kingcombe and discussed flowers and their uses in traditional folk law; Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla* or 'dew cup', the dew held in the hairy leaves is a highly prized base for by herbalists, was one of the many mentioned. We also harked back to how busy hay-making time would have been 150 years ago, and talked about how the composition of the hay meadows will not have changed much since the days of the scythe.

There were lots of interesting plants along the way: devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, knapweed and sedges galore, and a field full of southern marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. A great day.
Emily Newton

Studland Heath (Diver Project) 29th May

Five people joined the regular Thursday volunteers, who divided into two groups. Jim White writes, 'A group spent the morning finishing off the survey of the War Hill end of Inner Ridge. Combining the two weeks' counts gave a list of 65 taxa recorded, including 19 "new" finds, from just around the hill-top, much influenced by the rubble of calcareous material derived from the WWII lookout. These odd species for the dunes included black spleenwort, carline thistle and ploughman's-spikenard. It was useful to see bearded fescue and squirrel-tail fescue growing side by side in places, and lots of sea fern-grass and fine-leaved sheep's-fescue. "New" finds included bird's-foot and bird's-foot clover:

'We moved then to the quite different Redhorn Quay, a very small compartment at the edge of Brand's Bay. We had no earlier list to compare but clocked 60 species. It was a largely a hands-and-knees job, surprisingly comfortable on the close turf, and it was good to see a range of coastal plants – both of sandy shingle and upper salt marsh. We found false fox-sedge and shrubby sea-blite, and, on a smaller scale, knotted hedge-parsley and more bird's-foot clover.'

Robin Walls writes, 'Our party surveyed Third Ridge North, which proved to be quite variable. Much of the area is mature heathland on dunes that developed over the Tertiary strata. Within that there are blowouts with short bare sand and grass where we found many of the more interesting species (bulbous meadow-grass, mossy stonecrop, suffocated and bird's-foot clovers, dune fescue, fine-leaved sheep's-fescue). In the south and near the road are woodlands and scrub. A narrow band of purple moor-grass dominated wetland runs parallel to the road. We extended the list considerably from Diver's, but then failed

to find good number of his. The main reason for this is that we took the decision to exclude the maritime species which would be better recorded in the Bramble Bush Bay compartment.

'In the afternoon, we moved a little north and tackled South Haven Flats, which was much the same as the morning's compartment. There were a number of wetland species in Diver's list and we found none of these or any habitat where they might occur. A good area of scrub on the southern end had been cleared and it is there that we found better diversity. Some concrete blocks had been uncovered, opening the possibility of calcicolous species like those on War Hill. Of these, we only found black spleenwort.'

River Frome, Wool 30th May

There were 17 attendees for this walk. Plants of note: common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, water-speedwell *Veronica anagallis-aquatica*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, broad-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans*, lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*, branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, lesser water-parsnip *Berula erecta*, brooklime *Veronica beccabunga* and yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*.

We happily avoided the rain, and spent two hours looking at the plants of the ditches and the River Frome as well as seeing swallows, house martins, swifts, greylag goose, sedge warbler, little egret, reed bunting, fleeting kingfisher, and heard a Cetti's warbler. We also saw water vole burrows, feeding signs and droppings.

Rachel Janes

Priory Marsh, Christchurch 31st May

Owing to some confusion over the start time, two walks were combined into one spread over three hours from 10am to 1pm. The weather was comfortably warm, dry and mostly sunny, with light south-westerly winds. Also owing to the confusion an exact head count was not taken but in total around 20 to 25 people attended the walk(s) at some point.

Many of the expected salt-marsh plants were in flower, such as celery-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus*, bulbous foxtail *Alopecurus bulbosus*, Brookweed *Samolus valerandi* and a plethora of sedges and rushes. Other plants not in bloom, such as marsh-mallow *Althaea officinalis*, were shown to the group. We then moved on to the scrubby areas and some of the taller vegetation on the edge of the recreation ground. Plants in these areas included hop *Humulus lupulus*, tansy *Tanacetum vulgare*, black horehound *Ballota nigra* and horse-radish *Armoracia rusticana*. Many of the uses and medicinal properties of

the flowers were explained as well as their identification features.

Philip Budd

Nea Meadows, Christchurch 31st May

The good weather continued into the afternoon, when between 2.30pm and 4.30pm another wild flower walk took place at the delightful urban oasis of Nea Meadow. Twelve people attended the walk and, if anything, the insects outshone the flora, with common blue butterflies active and damselflies, including the beautiful demoiselle, down by the lake.

Of the flora identification features, uses and medicinal properties of some species were again explained. Also available was a list of species previously recorded at the site and only one (rather unwelcome) additional species was added to this list – turkey oak *Quercus cerris*. There was a range of waterside, meadow and even woodland species. Some day-lily *Hemerocallis fulva* is established by the wooded stream valley. In the meadow above the lake there was a good showing of yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, corky-fruited water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* and various leguminous plants.

Philip Budd

Hod Hill 1st June

A small group of four gathered at the National Trust car park near to Hod Hill to look at the flora of the woodland and rings of the hill fort. The lower woodland path is closed for repairs but the group walked along the short path through the middle of Nutcombe wood to the north-west. The damp woodland here has abundant hart's-tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium* and stinking iris *Iris foetidissima* – still in flower, just. We also saw wood melick *Melica uniflora* and a single plant of sanicle *Sanicula europaea*.

After following the steep track up to the hill fort we paused by a fine chalk bank with a few common spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum* and salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*. The question was raised as to how the latter got its name; later research suggests that the young leaves give a cucumber flavour to salads.

We continued onto the outer ring running along the northern edge of the hill fort. Here we saw a last early purple orchid *Orchis mascula* hanging on from a good show in early May, with many more of the common spotted-orchid present. Common rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* was also quite abundant, replacing the earlier cowslips *Primula veris* as the yellow component of the sward. The first butterflies appeared as the temperature increased; adonis blue was seen first, with a small heath

nearby. There were tantalising glimpses of a small orange butterfly but it took some time before one settled close enough for us all to admire a fresh marsh fritillary.

We alternated between the dip between the rings and the top until we reached the middle of the eastern side. Greater butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* was present in one place on the lower slope, with common gromwell *Lithospermum officinale* quite nearby. The butterflies continued to entertain, with good views of grizzled skipper and later dingy skipper.

We returned along the central path; the middle of the hillfort is less floristically rich, possibly through past cultivation, but we did manage to find chalk fragrant-orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* on the banks of the Roman fort to the north-west. A yellowhammer was calling and one flew into a hawthorn near our path but we remarked on the lack of swallows. The walk ended at about 1pm, with some of the party staying on to picnic on the rings. All were agreed that this is a lovely site with a superb mix of chalk flora and butterflies to entertain visitors.

Jon Crewe

Durlston National Nature Reserve 1st June

Ten of us assembled for the last walk of the week, with the leader using a tramper because of his back problem. Several garden escapes were seen on the walk from the castle up to the car park. Green alkanet *Anchusa officinalis* and ivy-leaved toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis* being the most showy. Crossing the car park we saw field forget-me-not *Myosotis arvensis* by a kerb, and the leader suggested looking for more species by the kerbs later in the season. The meadows yielded yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, with a few pale flax *Linum bienne* not having yet shed their petals.

In the second meadow there is a shallow quarry with thin soil around it, giving rise to a downland flora of which horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* and chalk milkwort *Polygala calcarea* were the most colourful members. Careful searching revealed early gentian *Gentianella anglica*. Continuing through the meadows we saw the splendid array of ox-eye daisies *Leucanthemum vulgare* in Ox-eye Field, with supporting cast of rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus* and common vetch *Vicia sativa*, before retracing our steps.

Edward Pratt

Field meetings 2015

Recorders training day for BSBI Atlas Kingcombe Centre Saturday 18th April 10am-4pm Led by Robin Walls, Andrew Branson and Amber Rosenthal

An introduction to BSBI 2020 Atlas recording for Dorset. Topics will include current coverage, where there are gaps in recording, how to record a tetrad, use of various recording systems, including Living Record, and verification of records. After a break and something to eat (there is a café at the centre or bring your own food) there will be a visit to some mixed habitats on the reserve to discuss approaches to recording in the field. We hope this will be an enjoyable introduction to the atlas recording. The meeting is open to anyone who would like to contribute. Rather than leaving people on their own to record as the season develops we hope to set up a mini support mentoring system to help people develop their skills. If you like identifying flowers and getting out and about in the glorious Dorset countryside, then this is for you.

Please book with Amber Rosenthal on 01305 217984; email: arosenthal@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk. Information on Kingcombe Centre and directions at www.kingcombe.org.

Wild Flower Week 23rd – 31st May

A full week of wildflower walks around Dorset for everyone. Leaflets will be available at libraries, tourism information centres, National Trust outlets, and interpretation centres throughout the county. To see the full leaflet, go to the Dorset Environmental Records Centre website (www.derc.org.uk) and follow the links to local groups.

Early gentian count Dorset Wildlife Trust Fontmell Down ST884176 Meeting date to be arranged (end of May/ first two weeks of June). Meet at 10.30am Led by Amber Rosenthal

A small team of people is sought to help with a detailed survey of the early gentians at this site, to be scheduled around peak flowering and suitable weather, with final arrangements being made closer to the time. The survey is likely to take a full day and will require a reasonable level of fitness, and patience, but with the reward of spending the day at this fabulous site and contributing to our knowledge of this endemic species. For more information or to register your interest please contact Amber on 01305 217984; email: arosenthal@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Smooth cat's-ear survey Studland Thursday 11th June 10am Led by Robin Walls

A chance to contribute towards a baseline survey of this elusive species. There will be a training session in the morning, before heading out to track down some plants. Meet at 10am in the Discovery Centre car park at Knoll Beach, Studland. It is important to time the date of the meeting to catch the plant during its flowering period, so please register your interest by contacting Michelle Brown at email: Michelle.Brown1@nationaltrust.org.uk; or telephone 01929 452309; mobile 07483 177989.

Bickham Wood survey Saturday 13th June Led by Robin Walls and Steve Parker (VC 5 recorder)

Meet at 10.30am. This is an under-recorder part of north-west VC 9. Bickham Wood is a Somerset Wildlife Trust reserve. A suitable parking place has yet to be found. Please book with Robin Walls (10 Old Brickfields, Broadmayne, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8UY, email: robin@rmwalls.plus.com) and include your email and mobile phone number so that we can decide on a meeting location appropriate to the number of cars.

Yellow vetchling survey at Durlston Country Park date tbc Led by Ted Pratt and Anita Diaz

This is a joint meeting with Bournemouth University to survey this Nationally Scarce species in one of its best habitats in England. DFG members will be emailed with the details of the meeting nearer the time.

Lankham Bottom BC reserve survey Saturday 4th July Led by Jon Crewe

This site is a Butterfly Conservation reserve a short walk from the village of Cattistock, near Maiden Newton in West Dorset. A 2007 survey found 25 Dorset Notable plants but the site is probably under recorded. A Dorset Environmental records centre walk in December took us through some impressive scenery and we all felt that a return visit in the summer would be worthwhile.

Parking in Cattistock is very restricted and as a result this excursion is booking only; we will issue parking and meeting instructions to participants the month before the meeting. Numbers will be restricted and transport sharing is advised. To book a place please email R.rogers@dorsetcc.gov.uk or call the leader Jon Crewe on 07989 777757.

Joint DFG/BSBI weekend survey in North Dorset Saturday/Sunday 18th & 19th July Led by Robin Walls and Andrew Branson

The north of Dorset is under-recorded, with most records being rather old. This meeting will be a chance to rediscover the delights of the upper Stour and the commons of the Blackmoor Vale, as well as some unexplored footpaths and woodlands in this quiet corner of Dorset. We also hope to resurvey some of the Sites of Nature Conservation Interest that are overdue for a botanical search.

The River Stour has good stands of emergent macrophytes, including sedges, flowering-rush *Butomus umbellatus*, arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia* and old records of sea club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus*. The last of these is probably the newly recognised taxon *B. laticarpus* and we wish to confirm this. There are records for some interesting pondweeds and a variety of duckweeds *Lemna* spp. Bring a grapnel if you have one.

We will be based in the Sturminster Newton – Marnhull area. When booking, please include a mobile phone number and it will be useful to have some idea as to whether you will be needing advice on B&B options or a campsite. Full details of the meeting will be available nearer the time.

Booking: Robin Walls, 10 Old Brickfields, Broadmayne DT2 8UY. email: robin@rmwalls.plus.com.

Slepe Heath surveys Saturday 9th May & Wednesday 9th September 10am-4pm Led by Ted Pratt and David Brown

Meet at 10am both dates, bring lunch, and bring wellingtons in September – and a GPS if possible both times. Meet at the south-east gate SY 961856 on 9th May and at the east gate SY957861 on 9th September. For bookings contact David Brown, National Trust Purbeck Office 01929 452308, or email david.brown4@nationaltrust.org.uk

The 80ha Slepe Heath was acquired by the National Trust in 2014 and its combination of wet and dry heath, mires and small patches of woodland represent the largest



Slepe Heath. National Trust Image

lowland heath acquisition the Trust has made for over a decade. It is of key conservation importance as it links Hartland Moor with the RSPB reserve at Arne. The last published survey of the site is from 1980, so we are keen to update this and create a good baseline from which to plan our future management of the site.

Happy Bottom & Lytchett Bay DWT reserves surveys Wednesday 12th August Led by Amber Rosenthal and Robin Walls

Meet at 10.30am for Happy Bottom, a new DWT Nature Reserve, bring lunch and recording equipment (clipboards/notebooks, etc). Parking just off Merley Park Road at SY997978 (track to the north – will be signposted on day, nearest post code BH21 3DD just to south of entrance). The aim of the visit is to get a good idea of what species are present on site and where, and to contribute records to the BSBI atlas recording project, so please come prepared to make your own species lists and be ready to process them afterwards. In the afternoon we will move on to another recent DWT acquisition at Lytchett Bay (roadside parking at SY974927, nearest postcode BH16 5DP just to east) to look specifically at the heathland habitat. Please ring on the day if you wish to come only to the afternoon to confirm timings. For more information contact Amber Rosenthal on 01305 217984; email: arosenthal@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk. Contact on the day (Amber) 07917 171427.

This edition of Dorset Heath was compiled by Andrew Branson. Many thanks to all the contributors, particularly John Newbould and Robin Walls. If you have any comments or would like to contribute to a future edition please contact: Andrew Branson, Dorset Group Chairman, Riversdale, The Street, Stour Provost, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 5RZ; tel: 01747 838223; email: andrew@3alpacos.co.uk.

Dorset plant records should be sent to VC 9 Recorder, Robin Walls, 10 Old Brickfields, Broadmayne, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8UY, email: robin@rmwalls.plus.com.

Dorset Flora Group is linked to the Dorset Environmental Records Centre, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, Dorset Wildlife Trust, The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, Natural England and The National Trust.