

The Dorset Heath

Newsletter of the Dorset Flora Group



Bob Gibbons

The Dorset Flora Group AGM back in November was a well-attended and enjoyable affair.

The Dorset Wildlife Trust's Headquarters at Brooklands Farm was again a great venue for the meeting; many thanks to Amber Rosenthal and the Dorset Wildlife Trust for arranging this and allowing the DFG to hold its meeting there. The series of talks by Robin Walls, Ted Pratt and Tony Bates provided a good summary of some of the work the Dorset Flora Group has been involved in during 2015 and also some of the highlights of the botanical year. Once again, Peter and Margaret Cramb provided a suitably testing quiz, which this year was won by Jonathan Cox.

Bob Gibbons gave an excellent talk on the flora of Newfoundland, illustrated with some mouth-watering photographs of the island's spectacular scenery and plants. Looking at those images of the wild, relatively unspoilt landscape of Newfoundland really brought home how altered and manicured the landscape of Dorset has become. The detailed survey work of the National Trust's Cyril Diver Project (see page 7) is highlighting some dramatic changes to habitats over the last 80 years, but what must the Studland Peninsula been like several thousand of years ago (if it

was there at all)? The other major project in which the Dorset Flora Group is involved is the *BSBI 2020 Atlas*. I know from tramping the footpaths of the northern part of the county over the last season, just how degraded large areas have become. One is drawn to corners of fields and hedgebanks to try and work out what the flora of even the recent past might have been. All this makes finding a few gems all the more significant. The work that we do to monitor these changes will hopefully provide a guide to better, more considered, planning and management in the future.

There was a request at the AGM for more workshops to help with all this fieldwork. To this end we have workshops on grasses in July and roses in early September (see page 24). Others are planned, so do register your interest. The highly successful Dorset Wild Flower Week will be held this year from the 28th May to 5th June and, I am sure, will be an enjoyable event thanks to all the hard work by Ted Pratt and his team of leaders.

Spring is almost upon us, and I look forward to seeing you over the coming season. Good plant hunting!

Andrew Branson



Bob Gibbons

Vice-county Recorder's notes for 2015

Robin Walls

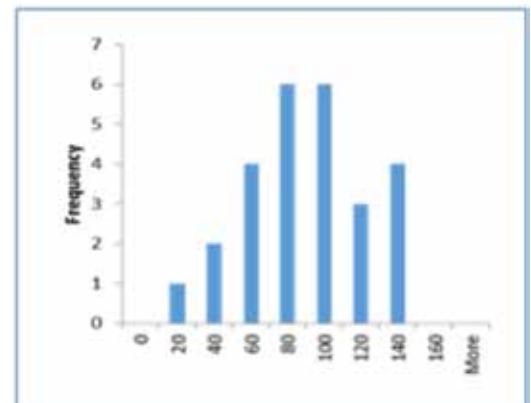
Recording for the BSBI Atlas 2020

Although the Atlas 2020 project started in 2010 and some progress had been made in previous years, it was in 2015 that we (Andy Branson did most of the local preparation) organised a weekend with the sole intention of grid-square recording. This was held near Sturminster Newton, in north Dorset, and run as a joint event with the BSBI. Many of the monads (1km grid squares) recorded had no records since 2000 before we started, so even the commonest of species was a valuable record.

In terms of numbers:

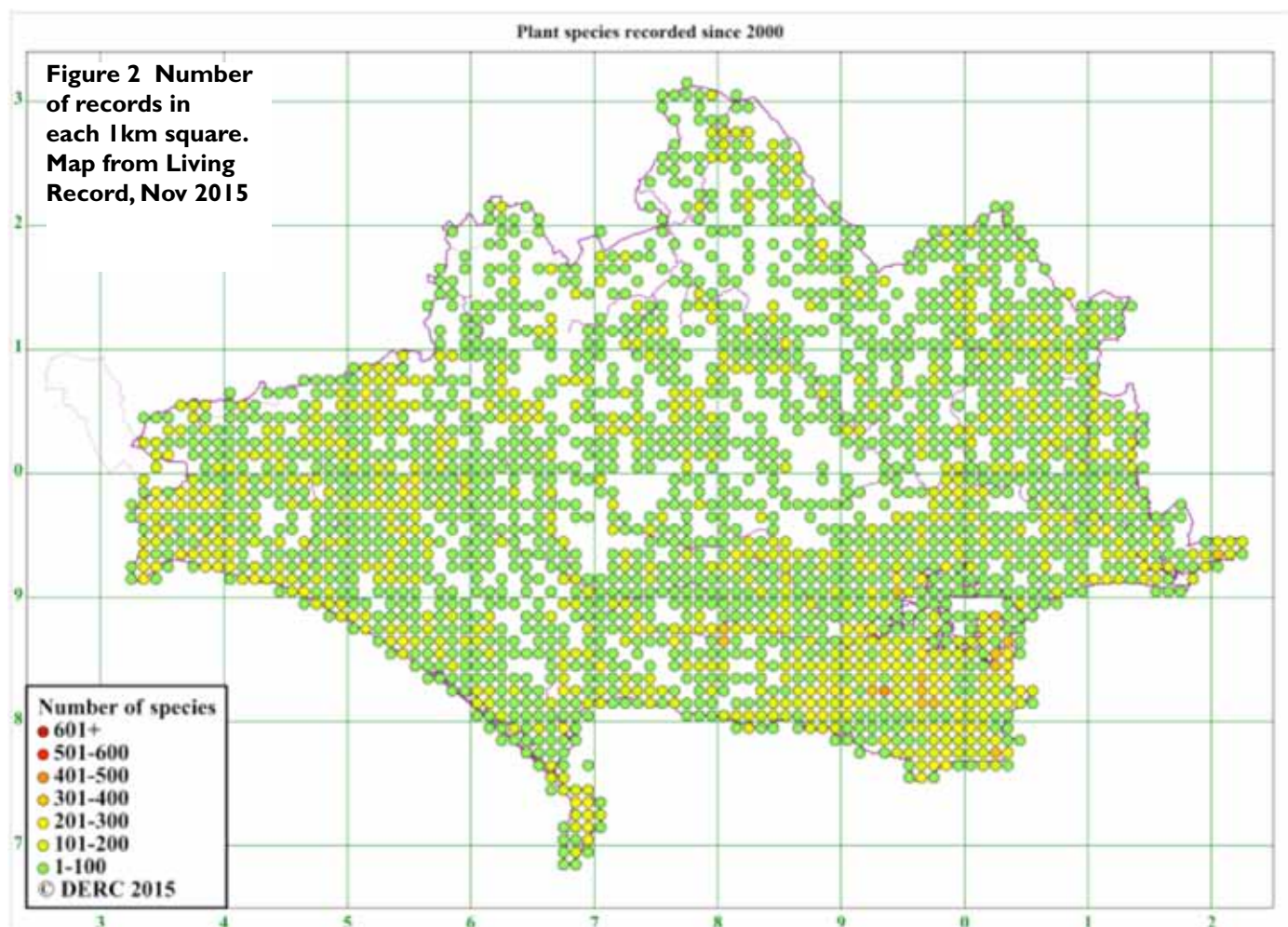
- we recorded 26 monads, many without any previous records;
- we had 25 people and four or five recording parties each day;
- on average, we recorded 80 species per monad, the maximum was 140 and the minimum five;
- there was a total of 2,099 records from the weekend.

Figure 1
Histogram
of numbers
of species
recorded in
monads.



For the statistically minded, the frequency distribution is in Fig. 1.

The county situation regarding records is illustrated below by the map of 1km-square records (Fig. 2). However, there are more records than this because Living Record does not capture all the data, but the general pattern is clear – much more needs to be done in the centre and north of the county.



We should not be depressed by the 'white holes' in the map. Since last year just over 30,000 records have been added and an additional 75 squares have been recorded. Most of this 2015 data has not been added to the DERC database. Over the next few years, I anticipate the situation will change dramatically. Several members have already been hard at work and you can probably guess where they live from the mapped records. It would be nice to have an idea of how many species might be found in a typical 1km grid square. At the moment it looks as though we should be able to reach 300 in the south, and perhaps 200 or more in the north.

The Cyril Diver Project

The Cyril Diver Project at Studland has now finished and the first report is nearly completed. This has occupied much of my time over the last three years and many of flora group members have been involved in this splendid example of 'citizen science'. Many of the 'citizens' were very competent naturalists before the project started, but all have benefited in many ways. At the last count, 620 vascular plant species were recorded between 2013 and 2015, and the project has generated more than 9,500 vascular plant records (see article on page 7).

The Beech Fern



The vice-county of Dorset (vc 9) differs from the administrative county in places. Most notably in the east and the north-west. In the latter, west of Chard in the Blackdown Hills, is Bickham Wood, the site of the last records (in 1986) for Beech Fern *Phegopteris connectilis* in Dorset (now administered by Somerset).

We arranged a joint meeting with the Somerset Rare Plants Group to see if we could refind it. We failed to do

so, but Steve Parker (the South Somerset VC 5 recorder) and I are reluctant to say it is now extinct in the wood because it may survive hidden within the undergrowth. The wood falls into two monads and there is a meadow, which we recorded separately. The most impressive sight of the day was a large stand of Wood Horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum* which Peter Cramb showed us on our last trawl back through the wood to the cars.

Early Meadow-grass



Figure 3 Records of *Poa infirma* in south-east England.

Early Meadow-grass *Poa infirma* was one of the exciting finds on the Studland Peninsula this year, at least for the more discerning botanists. Ted Pratt was thrilled when he first found it and I was very pleased to find some more patches on our regular survey days for the Diver Project. We did detect 'Poa fatigue' affecting some of the Diver Project volunteers after a few weeks looking for this and its equally diminutive relative, the Bulbous Meadow-grass *Poa bulbosus*.

Early Meadow-grass seems to be rapidly colonising south-east England. In the *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora* (2002) this species was only recorded from 66 hectads, all of which were on the south coast. The distribution from the BSBI database shows that it is now widespread all the way round to Essex and includes enough inland records to believe these are not errors or just casual occurrences.

Heath Lobelia



The severe management in February 2014 has paid off! Tony Bates and I counted 2,400 Heath Lobelia *Lobelia urens* flowering spikes in August 2015. This compares with only half a dozen the year before. Despite the poor

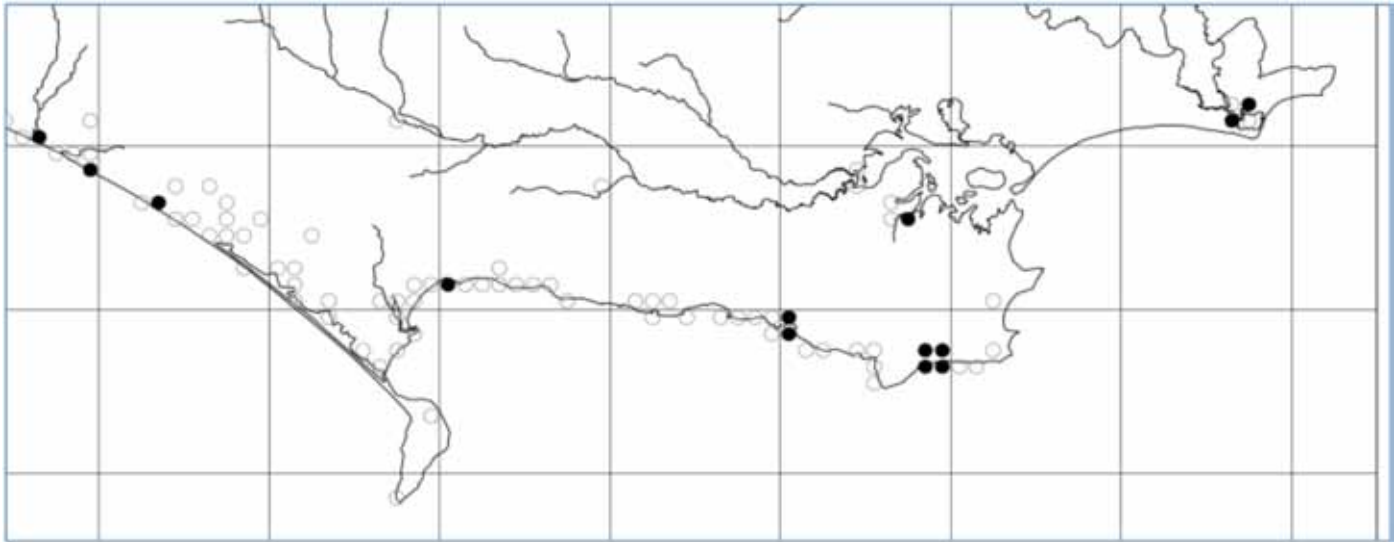


Figure 4 Dorset records for Wild Celery *Apium graveolens*. Black spots for records since 2000, white spots for earlier records.

showing in the summer 2014, we were anticipating a good population because we had found plenty of seedlings in 2014 and the plant is essentially a biennial. Each spike has a dozen or so flowers and each produces many seeds. It may be possible for the 2014 plants to have produced enough seeds, but unlikely. So many of the plants must have germinated from the seed bank once the conditions were improved by the management.

The main site for Heath Lobelia is very close to one of the sites being considered for yet another major gravel quarry. How this will affect the population is uncertain. The planners have been told of the importance of the species and hopefully this will be taken into consideration in the site selection process.

Wild Celery

A map of the distribution of Wild Celery *Apium graveolens* in Dorset illustrates an apparent loss all the way along the coast (Fig. 4). This is an apparent decline in the county from being almost ubiquitous to only 11 squares. I am not sure how much this plant is looked for; umbelifers are shunned by some botanists. It is very similar to the highly poisonous Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and could be overlooked. Equally, it is possible that some of the old records are in fact mis-identifications for this species. Most floras will give reliable characters to distinguish the species, but using taste is not advised in this instance!

New records

There have been plenty of refinds during the year and only a few of the more unusual records are highlighted here.

- David Leadbetter has spotted some new arrivals: Sweet-William Catchfly *Silene armeria* at Sandford and also several sites for Corsican Mint *Mentha requienii* on Brownsea Island.

- One of the good finds of the recording weekend near Sturminster Newton was native Black Poplar *Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*. Whilst we have plenty of hybrid black poplars, the native is now quite scarce and restricted to river valleys (see also report on page 14).

One of the more spectacular finds of 2015 was Moonwort *Botrychium lunaria* by Jennifer Walls on the way back from an early evening trip to Charity Meadows in Corfe. It is very difficult to find, even if you know where it is. Jim White went back to look for it and met John Winterbottom, who was in the party when it was found, and it still took them a lot of searching.



It was most serendipitous. The rest of us in the party were probably thinking more of getting back to the bottle of wine and dinner prepared by John and Di, which prompted Jim's remarks after he had gone to find the plant: 'Two lessons to come from this: the importance of temperance. Huge commendations to Jen! And, though it pains me to admit it, the value of Arsenal Football Club. Presumably had Ted not been watching the Cup Final on Saturday, you'd have gone on his original walk and possibly not seen the fields. You never know!'

An intriguing feature is that, although this is a new site, there are old records from the 10km grid square which have not been seen for 40 years or more. Is this the last remnant of a widespread population or is it just so difficult to find that it is still around in other sites but overlooked?

Brown Galingale re-discovered near Bere Regis

Bryan Edwards

Brown Galingale *Cyperus fuscus* is a very rare native plant found around the margins of shallow wetlands where the water levels fluctuate and often dry out totally during summer and early autumn. It has always been a rare plant in Britain confined to southern England, and currently is known from just four vice-counties from North Somerset (VC6) east to Middlesex (VC21).

It is listed as 'Extinct' in the Dorset Rare Plant Register. The first record was made by Rev. E.F. Linton in 1893 from the 'moor below the Church' at Bere Regis, and several weeks later was found at a second locality one to two miles downstream from the first; there were no further records from either locality. It was last recorded from the county at Cowgrove, near Wimborne, in 1929. All three locations were visited during a NCC survey of rare plants in the late 1980s, but the plant was not refound despite some suitable habitat surviving.

As part of management work on Bere Stream Site of Special Scientific Interest, Alders were cleared from two areas adjoining the stream to restore the former wetland vegetation. The work involved driving along a wet trackway which evidently disturbed a seedbank. While monitoring the results in late August 2015 a large plant of Brown Galingale was discovered on wet mud at the side of the track, and a determined search revealed 40 plants over an area of 10 x 5 metres. The site fits well with Linton's second locality downstream from Bere Regis church. It is doubtful that this is the first flowering of the plant since 1893, but the area has been looked at regularly over the last 30 years. The fortunate, and wholly accidental, combination of disturbance of the seedbank in the spring followed by a dry summer with low water levels provided ideal conditions for this species. It does show that plants can be very tenacious and as long as some habitat remains suitable with an intact seedbank, seemingly 'extinct' plants can reappear with careful restoration.

Brown Galingale at Bere Stream SSSI. *Bryan Edwards*



Heading south and new experiences

Jean Smith



**Maple-leaved
Goosefoot.**

Tom & Jean Smith

My husband, Tom, and I moved to Crossways in Dorset in December 2014 after spending many happy years in Wiltshire and being involved with the Wiltshire Botanical Society as active members. Before we moved we wanted to find out if there was an equivalent group in Dorset, so were pleased to discover the Dorset Flora Group.

I was glad to discover that the vice-county recorder, Robin Walls, lived in Broadmayne, just the next village along from us and met him early in 2015 and had an introduction to DFG and a crash course on Living Record that whetted my appetite for recording.

In April 2015 I attended the recorders (and would-be recorders!) meeting at the Kingcombe Centre and this was where hearing about under-recorded grid squares, I volunteered to take on a hectad for the BSBI 2020 Atlas (SY70/80 – 90), which covers the area to the east of Dorchester across to Tolpuddle and up to Piddletrenthide and Cheselbourne.

We started towards the end of April 2015 and immediately got hooked on recording. We also found this was a useful way of getting to know that part of Dorset and realising how beautiful and peaceful these less well-visited areas are (away from the coast and the main tourist areas). By the time we stopped recording around mid-October we'd covered 23 squares, but are planning revisits to record at different times of the growing season to get a good representation of each square. My most unusual plant recorded to date has been Maple-leaved Goosefoot *Chenopodium hybridum*, which we photographed (see above) for Robin, as well as taking round a sample to confirm its identity.

Going out with the group has been very enjoyable and visiting different habitats e.g. heathland and bog/wetland areas has been a pleasing contrast to Wiltshire, where we spent a lot of time in chalk grassland habitats. I'm looking forward to the new season getting going. Roll-on spring.

Some key facts from the Cyril Diver Project

Michelle Brown

December 2015 marked the end of the third and final recording season of the Cyril Diver Project. This ambitious scheme, led by the National Trust and involving many partners and a good proportion of Dorset's most knowledgeable naturalists across almost all taxa, conducted detailed ecological surveys of all taxa on South Haven Peninsula at Studland, with the aim of comparing the records first generated by pioneering ecologist Captain Cyril Diver and his esteemed colleagues in the 1930s.

Over the last three years, through a series of free workshops, student projects and placements, weekly regular survey groups and teaming beginners up with experts, a total of 220 volunteers have dedicated over 3,500 days to cataloguing and digitising over 10,000 historic documents, over 7,000 historic invertebrate and herbarium specimens and collecting over 37,000 contemporary records of almost 3,800 species across the South Haven Peninsula.

More hours have gone into botanical recording than into any other group, generating more than 9,750 records of almost 620 vascular plant species, more than 1,580 records of over 150 bryophyte species and more than 1,800 records of 22 species of fungi. This data forms

the foundation of the project report and underpins the analysis of change in species presence and distribution across the site, from hoverflies to small mammals, beetles, arachnids and dragonflies to heathland birds and Sika Deer.

Dramatic changes

Qualitative analysis of historic aerial and site photographs and habitat descriptions has been quantified based on Ellenberg Indicator Values for vascular plant species, revealing the key changes in species composition and distribution in each of the 97 'compartments' devised by Captain Diver and Professor Good in the 1930s. This analysis, combined with examination of plant functional strategies, has enabled us to interpret these changes in the range of habitats from Tertiary lowland heath, dune heath, mires, bogs and dune slacks, secondary woodland and the Poole Harbour shoreline which together form the landscape of the South Haven Peninsula we are familiar with today.

The changes over the last 80 years are, in some areas, dramatic. The dynamic eastern dunes and dune slacks have undergone significant change since the 1930s, as a result of the ongoing forces of nature: ecological succession has turned dune grassland to dune heath,

Robin Walls leading a Cyril Diver Project workshop on grass identification.

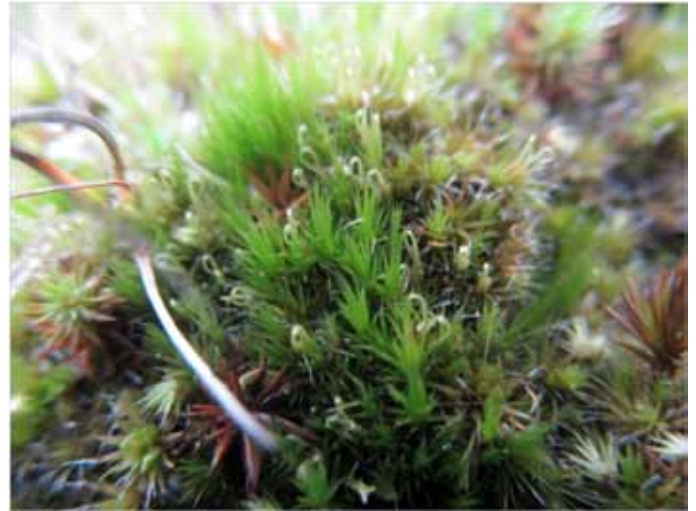




Cyril Diver Project volunteer Janet O'Connor surveying man-made habitats around Knoll Beach.

dune heath to scrub, and marsh to wet woodland. This, combined with the reduction in grazing and heath fires since Diver's surveys, has resulted in the change from an open and virtually treeless landscape to a more enclosed and scrub-dominated environment, with corresponding increases in competitor species and reductions in soil moisture levels and light-loving species across the dune ridges. An entirely new dune ridge and dune slack has

Cyril Diver project volunteers Gill Terry, Jim White and David White, with David Brown at the helm, surveying aquatic vegetation following carp removal.



***Campylopus introflexus* – the invasive non-native Heath Star-moss'.**

formed since 1930, creating new early succession habitats replacing those lost to ecological succession, but which are now prone to erosion from the dramatically increased visitor numbers to the site, which currently stand at approximately 1.2 million visitors per year.

The introduction of non-native invasive species, such as the Heath Star-moss *Campylopus introflexus*, thought to have arrived in the 1940s, has carpeted the bare sandy microhabitats on the dune heath upon which species such as the Heath Tiger Beetle *Cicindela sylvatica* and a suite of solitary bees and wasps depend.

Water levels in Little Sea and the surrounding marshes have continued to rise as a result of the blockage of previous man-made drainage channels, and correspondingly salinity levels have continued to drop as a result of increasing isolation of these wetland habitats

Cyril Diver Project Volunteers and Bournemouth University Students.



**Cyril Diver Project
volunteers surveying
heath and scrub
habitats on South
Haven Peninsula**



from the sea. The illegal introduction of carp to Little Sea in the 1960s has resulted in increased turbidity and the reduction of aquatic flora such as the Six-stamen Waterwort *Elatine hexandra*.

The woodlands have developed into a more stable and enclosed environment with increased canopy cover, which has shaded out the more light-demanding ground flora. The impact of grazing over the last 80 years by non-native Sika Deer is most pronounced here, with a resulting reduction in understorey vegetation.

The Tertiary lowland heath habitats of the Western Plateau have remained relatively stable since the 1930s, but with a general increase in vegetation height and scrub cover. This natural succession has been influenced by the reduction in traditional heathland management techniques, such as controlled burning and livestock grazing, since Diver's era.

The Harbour Shoreline has been subjected to increased erosion, water-level rise and increases in nutrient levels in Poole Harbour since the 1930s. A reduction in sand and gravel protrusions and saltmarsh communities is apparent from both the aerial photographs dating between 1927 and 2013, as well as the vegetation analysis which indicates a reduction in microhabitat features such as brackish inlets and pools.

Continuing volunteer effort

The end of the Diver Project marks the beginning of a continued effort to involve volunteers in biodiversity recording across all of the National Trust Purbeck sites. This data collected by volunteers will inform our updated and evidence-led management plans for the

National Trust properties and surrounding land.

Regular bryophyte surveys are already underway, and botany surveys will begin again in March 2016, usually 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.

Positions vacant!

I only know of one other person in Dorset getting involved in recording dandelions and brambles. The county could do with someone else younger than me – say 60 or less – willing to become a Dorset enthusiast for one or both of these genera, particularly in west or north Dorset. I have done a bit with each, and would be happy to advise anyone on how to get started.

There is an excellent BSBI handbook on dandelions, and also more help in the splendid Plant Crib 3, which is only available on-line. The drawback is the time spent arranging dandelions to get good pressed specimens.

Brambles are much easier to press. Their disadvantage is lack of a current handbook. There is one by Edees & Newton, which is out-of-print and expensive second-hand. There is, however, one of the national experts, David Allen, in the next county (Hampshire) who sometimes visits Dorset for a recording and training day. Also John Norton of Gosport is building a database of southern species.

Please contact me if you would like to know more, without commitment!

Ted Pratt, email: e.pratt@uwclub.net

Field meeting reports 2015

29th April 2015 Downhouse Farm to Eype Mouth Leader John Newbould

Five members joined in this National Trust survey, which took in Thorncombe Beacon, and fields along the inland coastal path from Downhouse Farm to Eype Mouth.

Thorncombe Beacon at 150m is found in the south-west corner of the survey area. From this is a large field, which slopes steeply east towards Eype Mouth. Here is an area of NVC U4 grassland with large areas of Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* forming an NVC W25 scrub community. Scattered Gorse – Bramble form an NVC W23 *Ulex europaeus* – *Rubus fruticosus* community. On the survey date, the field had not been closed up with nearly all the Bluebells chewed off by sheep. Herbs present included Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*, Field Wood-rush *Luzula campestris*, Hedge Bedstraw, *Galium album*, an occasional Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea* and Red Campion *Silene dioica*. Linnet and Wheatear were migrating inwards. Invertebrates recorded include Gorse Shield-bug *Piezodorus lituratus* and the Green Shield-bug *Palomena prasina*. We also saw 2-spot and 7-spot Ladybirds together with Harlequin Ladybirds and a single Wall butterfly.

The cliff top at Thorncombe Beacon is slumping and there was no longer indication of the maritime grassland community

Recording at Thorncombe Beacon in April.

John Newbould

containing Thrift *Armeria maritima*.

In the afternoon session, we surveyed two large fields to the west of Lower Eype. The south-west boundary is formed by a stream lined with Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with an understory of Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* and rarely Field Maple *Acer campestre* and Buckthorn *Rhamnus cathartica*. Bluebells were scarce here whilst Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* was occasional in the ditch. Wet areas in the field had Cuckoo-flower *Cardamine pratensis*, Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*, Marsh Horsetail *Equisetum palustre*, Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, Marsh Foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus* and Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*.

The drier grassland was mainly Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, with Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Bulbous Buttercup *R. bulbosus* and Lesser Celandine.

At Eype the rust *Puccinia smyrnii* on Alexanders *Smyrniolum olusatrum* was noted, as were the galls *Lipara lucens*, a rare gall on Common Reed *Phragmites australis*, *Rabdophaga saliciperda* on Grey Willow and *Dasineura urticae* on Nettle *Urtica dioica*. In addition, Una Garland recorded three females and one male of the violet oil-beetle *Meloe proscarabaeus* on the soft cliff above the beach.



1st May 2015 Seatown to Doghouse Hill Leader John Newbould.

With this National Trust survey, I was helped considerably by Jonathon Cox to cover some quite large fields, with steep slopes east of Seatown. One of the National Trust's rangers dropped us off by the River Winniford (SY422918), which drains the valley from North Chideock. Also to the east, the valley slopes below Frogmore Hill and Doghouse Hill. Alongside the National Trust land is an Alder *Alnus glutinosa* thicket with Ramsoms *Allium ursinum*. Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and Red Campion *Silene dioica* were scarce. Harts-tongue Fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* grew on the bank edges. Hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and Alexanders *Smyrniololium olusatrum* were found in more open places.

The large west-facing field, just east of the Seatown car park is difficult to describe. There are features such as a Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* thicket, which is really wood-pasture which includes veteran Hawthorn, as well as Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Elder *Sambucus nigra*. The aerial photograph shows three old field boundaries running north east, which are partially hedged. There are a number of anthills on Sweet Vernal-grass grassland *Anthoxanthum odoratum* where Thrift *Armeria maritima* forms coastal grassland at the cliff edge with Buck's-horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus*. Sea mouse-ear *Cerastium diffusum*, Early Forget-me-not *Myosotis ramosissima*, Parsley-piert *Aphanes arvensis*, Lesser Chickweed *Stellaria pallida* and Dove's-foot Cranesbill *Geranium molle* were found on sandy disturbed ground. Steep unmanaged slopes had Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Bluebell. One steep north-facing bank was covered with Primrose *Primula vulgaris*. Common Dog-violet, Field Wood-rush *Luzula campestris*, Common Bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* were scattered across the field. Pignut *Conopodium majus* was found on the eastern side of the field. The grassland contained the mosses *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*, *Pseudoscleropodium purum* and less commonly *Brachythecium rutabulum*.

The north-west corner had an old field boundary of Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, NVC type W23, which is set in the bottom of the valley where seepages formed a large NVC type M23 marsh dominated by Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, Hard Rush *J. inflexus*, with Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, Ragged-robin *Silene flos-cuculi*, Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*, Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus* and Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*. The grassland had scattered Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Common Dog-violet, Field Wood-rush, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Bulbous Buttercup, *R. bulbosus*, Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*, Bugle *Ajuga reptans*, Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, Three-veined Sandwort *Moehringia trinerva* (rare), Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*, White Clover *T. repens* and Ground Ivy *Glechoma hederacea*. The grass component was mainly Yorkshire-fog *Holcus*

lanatus, Sweet Vernal-grass, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*. This may loosely be considered NVC type U4. The grassland contained the mosses *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* and *Calliergonella cuspidata*.

Doghouse Hill

Coastal edge grassland: Jonathon Cox classed the cliff edge as NVC type MC5 Thrift–Sea Mouse-ear *Armeria maritima*–*Cerastium diffusum* halophyte community. Here the parched cliff edge is well grazed by sheep, who also make their way down the cliff. Of particular interest here is a good colony of Milk Thistle *Silybum marianum*, Lesser Chickweed *Stellaria pallida*, Annual Pearlwort *Sagina apetala*, Slender Thistle, *Carduus tenuifolia*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Mouse-eared Hawkweed *Pilosella officinalis* (rare), Wild Thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, Dove's-foot Cranesbill *Geranium molle* and Early Hair-grass *Aira praecox*.

The western slopes: This acid grassland had a nearest NVC community fit to U4. These slopes had scattered Gorse, with good herb-rich grassland with Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, Lady's Bedstraw, Cat's-ear, Lesser Hawkbit *Leontodon saxatilis*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Field Wood-rush, Mouse-eared Hawkweed (rare), Bulbous Buttercup, Lesser Celandine, Wild Thyme and Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*. Grasses include Common Bent, Sweet Vernal-grass, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and frequent Cock's-foot. Heath Wood-rush *Luzula multiflora* was rare on the lower north-west slope. Adjacent to the footpath to the north was an area of scrub with Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Field Maple *Acer campestre*, Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Gorse, which is locally frequent. Primrose *Primula vulgaris* was rare here. Common Dog-violet and Red Campion were found near the scrub. There is a working Rabbit warren at SY42999152 and anthills are found at SY42909141 and SY42949146

4th May 2015 Westhay Farm for annual Green-winged Orchid survey Leader John Newbould

On behalf of the National Trust, I organise two public walks in early May to show the public the stunning display of Green-winged Orchids *Anacamptis morio* in four meadows adjacent to Westhay Farm. Although the orchids have been known here for some time, we have monitored the sites annually since 2008 and it is pleasing to note that the display gets better every year. The orchid is rated IUCN Vulnerable and is found along with Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and many herbs from the daisy family. This year, it was disappointing to find that the field nearest the sea had not been closed up to cattle and numbers were down. However, in the fields to the west of Monument Coppice, good numbers – too many to count were present. In addition, amazingly there was a single orchid in flower for the second year in the acid grassland of Stonebarrow Hill.



Above **A Green-winged Orchid at St Gabriel's.** John Newbould

Below **Discussing tactics ahead of the day's recording at Slepe Heath in May.** John Newbould

One week later, a small group gathered to survey meadows round St Gabriel's. Fourteen flowering spikes of Green-winged Orchid were found in one meadow to the west of St Gabriel's House. In addition, we found 20 flowering spikes in a small north-facing meadow, along with herbs such as Bitter-vetch *Lathyrus linifolius*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and many Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, indicating an earlier wood-pasture management.

9th May 2015 Slepe Heath Leader David Brown; reports David Brown and John Newbould

The 16 recorders divided into four different groups, and recorded the dry heathlands and woodland that dominate the southern half of the site, including the large tracts of land that were, until the last decade, a Corsican Pine *Pinus nigra laricio* plantation.

JAN recorded with a group surveying heathland restored from coniferous plantation immediately north of the southern track adjacent to Hartland Moor. The area contained a number of areas where brash had been burnt and these proved to be more interesting. Phillip Johnson provided us with a list of birds, including the distant call of Woodlark from the remaining plantation. Hobby was seen overhead following the Swallows and Swifts. He recorded one Skylark, plenty of Meadow Pipit and, in one of the few areas of Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Linnet and Stonechat. He also saw a Sand Lizard amongst Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*.

The burnt areas had frequent Common Stork's-bill *Erodium*



cicutarium, Sticky Groundsel *Senecio viscosus* and Small Cudweed *Filago minima*, Lesser Chickweed *Stellaria pallida*, Wavy bitter-cress *Cardamine flexuosa* and Shepherd's purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*. The burnt areas were also covered in a limited range of mosses including *Campylopus introflexus*, *Syntrichia ruralis* subsp. *ruralis*, *Dicranum scoparium*, *Barbula convulata* and *Funaria hygrometrica*.

Amongst the tree stumps, Heather *Calluna vulgaris* was becoming established, together with the IUCN-rated Vulnerable dodder *Cuscuta epithymum* in two places. Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* was seen in dry places, whilst Cross-leaved Heath *E. tetralix* was much scarcer in the few wet places. Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* and Tormential *Potentilla erecta* were scarce. Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* was seen in the southern track in wet areas.

South of the southern track were areas of Gorse *Ulex europaeus* where we noted Emperor Moth *Saturnia pavonia* and an area of young Silver Birch *Betula pendula* with many leafmines of the micro-moth *Stigmella betulicola*.

The 2015 annual report of the British Trust for Ornithology reports on current work to determine the effectiveness of bare ground to improve habitat for Woodlark and also the importance of young (1-10 years) plantations for Nightjars to flourish. Factors, which will need to be taken into consideration, in future management of Slepe Heath.

30th May 2015 Garden Bioblitz at Hardy's Cottage Report John Newbould

Five members helped with this garden bioblitz, which took place on the date of a National Garden Bioblitz organised by, amongst others, John van Breda and Jane Adams of Corfe Mullen. For more information visit www.gardenbioblitz.org. We recorded 183 species and were 3rd in the national league table. The dates for 2016 are 4th and 5th of June.

Hardy's Cottage garden is divided into two habitats. To the west is an orchard, with a mainly Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* ground flora. In addition, garden Star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogallum angustifolium* is scattered in the grass along with Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Lesser Stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* and Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*. To the north, is a hedge of Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with Male Fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, Red Campion *Silene dioica* and Lords-and-Ladies *Arum maculatum*.

To the south, the Beech *Fagus sylvatica* woodland of Thorncombe Wood encroaches into the garden along with Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*.

The cottage garden has Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*,



Visitors at the National Trust display at the Garden Bioblitz at Hardy's Cottage. John Newbould

Common Cornsalad *Valerianella locusta* and Three-nerved Sandwort *Moehringia trinerva*.

We recorded nine species of moss including 'thatch-moss' *Leptodontium gemmascens* and the minute epiphytic liverwort *Cololejeunea minutissima*.

There were seven species of butterfly; around 30 birds including a Red Kite flying over; with bees such as the Red Mason Bee, hoverflies, such as the distinctive Marmalade Hoverfly, whilst Adrian Mylward recorded a number of weevils.

3rd June 2015 Early Gentian survey at Fontmell Down Dorset Wildlife Trust Reserve Leader and report Amber Rosenthal

This year we managed to get the timing spot on, and avoid unhelpful thunderstorms, by booking the count in just a few days in advance. A good team of DFG members responded to the short notice call for action and, sweep-line-survey technique perfected, we proceeded to cover areas of suitable habitat in metre-by-metre precision, with each person scanning their allocated strip for the diminutive Early Gentian *Gentianella anglica*. However, despite a sterling effort from our team of ten, we were only able to cover the northern slopes of the down at this quite large and very steeply sided site, as it proved to be both time consuming and quite tiring!

At precisely 1,500 individual plants the count was much higher than the result for 2014 (58 plants) which covered approximately the same areas of the site, but the numbers are still proportionally down on the extremely impressive full-site count of 21,981 in 1997 (NB: it will be a relief to those involved this year to know that the 1997 count was completed over a number of days). Early Gentian is known to show considerable variation in numbers from year to year and the last two years of counts at this site, and the corresponding counts at DWT's

Townsend reserve near Swanage, certainly support this. In both cases there have been some issues with grazing over the same period which have meant that we have not been able to achieve quite the desired sward lengths in some key areas for the gentians. However, these issues have now been resolved and it will be interesting to see if the gentian numbers respond to a shorter sward or if other factors are at play (early spring weather is likely to be key).

With this in mind, we hope to do another repeat count next year (over two days!) to see how much the numbers fluctuate and to consider whether there is a way of sampling the site without having to thoroughly cover all the suitable habitat. Many thanks again to those who came along and were thoroughly exercised by all the upping-and-downing, and side-to-siding across the slopes!

6th July 2015 Yellow Vetchling Survey at Durlston Country Park **Leader and report E.A. Pratt**

Anita Diaz brought five students from Bournemouth University to join me in completing the survey of Yellow Vetchling *Lathyrus aphaca*, which had been begun last year.

The species was found in seven more sites – in Fields 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 34. These sites have been added to the map of last year's sites. The total of sites for the two years is 26. The species does not show in all past sites each year – nine other sites where it has flowered in the recent past did not have plants in 2014 or 2015. This must be one of the best sites in Britain for the species.

18th-19th July 2015 River Stour, near Marnhull, Dorset (part of the BSBI-DFG recording weekend) **Report Andrew Branson**

Saturday 18th July

In the morning we made our way along a stretch of the River Stour between Hammoon and Child Okeford. Here cattle had been allowed to graze along the banks and, as a result, the usual barrier of chest-high nettles, thistles and Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* had been replaced with an intricate mosaic of bare cliffs, emergents and colonising land plants. The river here is on Oxford Clay and is prone to extremes of flooding and low waters. Debris high above us in some of the overhanging trees testified to the height of the winter floods. The river was dominated by large stands of fruiting Common Club-rush *Schoenoplectus lacustris*, Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and more Reed Canary-grass. Surprisingly common was Flowering-rush *Butomus umbellatus*, and although only a few plants were actually in flower, the triangular, slightly spiralled, emergent leaves were a frequent component on the vegetation. The open banks had much Trifid Bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita*, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Purple-

loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, Lesser Water-parsnip *Berula erecta* and Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia*. After the initial excitement of finding some roadside Sharp-leaved Fluellen *Kickia elatine* and Weasel's-snout *Misopates orontium*, both scarce in north Dorset, we soon got our eyes in for Creeping Yellow-cress *Rorippa sylvestris* and Strawberry Clover *Trifolium fragiferum*, which were plentiful on the eroding riverbanks. One of the key species we were hoping to locate was the newly separated species of club-rush, *Bolboschoenus laticarpus*, seemingly a freshwater equivalent to the Sea Club-rush *B. maritimus*. Pleasingly, we found this and collected a fruiting head which enabled us to confirm the identity (the nut has a flatter profile and the mesocarp is different). The main macrophytes were Yellow Water-lily *Nuphar lutea* and Arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia* which, in places, covered the river. All forms of Arrowhead were visible, from the submerged banks of strap-like leaves, some with spoon-shaped surface leaves and others with the distinctive cuspidate leaves, to the classic aerial deeply arrow-shaped leaves and flowering spikes. Spiked Water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum* and the floating form of *Persicaria amphibia* were also common. Further downstream we encountered Fennel Pondweed *Potamogeton pectinatus*, Floating Bur-reed *Sparganium emersum*, Greater Duckweed *Spirodela polyrrhiza* and the cryptic Fat Duckweed *Lemna gibba*, which, in a thin state, appears to be the commonest duckweed in the river.

After lunch we drove down to Haywards Bridge, just west of Child Okeford. A similar emergent and river community was present with the addition of the Nationally Rare Loddon Pondweed *Potamogeton nodosus*. This section of the Stour, together with parts of the Loddon and Avon, near Bath, are the only places in the Britain where this grows. A walk through some already cut hay meadows produced some of the typical plants of the Stour floodplain, including Meadow Barley *Hordeum secalinum* and Corky-fruited Water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*.

Sunday 19th July

In the morning my group looked at part of the River Stour near the abandoned mill at Hinton St Mary. The ungrazed banks were dominated by *Phalaris* and Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* with much Common Club-rush *Schoenoplectus lacustris* and *Nuphar* in the water course. However, here large area were dominated by the submerged leaves of Shining Pondweed *Potamogeton lucens*. We again puzzled over the Duckweed (probably *L. gibba*), and there was also large drifts of Arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, with some Floating Bur-reed *Sparganium emersum* and, in the faster flowing sections, Spiked Water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*. Some stands of *Bolboschoenus laticarpus* were growing in a disused mill leet. A nice find was a large multi-stemmed Wild Pear *Pyrus pyraeaster*, with its small globose fruits, growing on the lane side near the mill. A path downstream through an area of secondary woodland and scrub added considerably to the species tally, but also included some

enormous unwelcome plants of Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* and a striking stand of Elecampane *Inula helenium*. Further downstream the river was more difficult to reach because of the dense bankside vegetation, but more *Bolboschoenus* was seen and a sample was collected to inspect the fruits, confirming that the plants were *B. laticarpus*. On our walk back we passed by some maize fields where some Field Pennywort *Thlaspi arvense* was spotted.

12th August 2015 Happy Bottom & Lytchett Bay Dorset Wildlife Trust Reserves visits Leaders and report Amber Rosenthal and Robin Walls

A small group turned out for this general recording session at two of the Dorset Wildlife Trust's recently acquired sites – Happy Bottom, currently being established as a 'Community Nature Reserve', and the DWT/ ARC 'Lytchett Bay Nature Reserve' which sits within the wider Bay.

Although Happy Bottom is not a particularly rich site botanically, one of the main aims of the morning was to establish a baseline with which to compare any future changes driven by the management DWT will introduce here. Whilst the site will be used primarily as a place for people to interact with more common wildlife, rather than being somewhere we have to worry about damage to sensitive species, we are likely to do some restoration work to bring more interest to the site for people to enjoy. We also hope that basic changes to management in some areas – a move from intensive horse grazing to hay cuts, with cattle or sheep aftermath grazing, for example – will allow the site to develop a more diverse flora and fauna. The intention was also that the records collected here would add to the coverage of Dorset for the BSBI Atlas recording project, by giving good returns for grid squares SY9998 and SY9997, as a follow up to the training workshop in April.

Having split into small groups to spread out across the site, at

least 304 records of some 117 species were generated. For each group the main recorder was tasked with adding the data for their part of the site into the online 'Living Record' database once they got home. This allowed the records to be immediately available for Robin to verify and meant that I, as a representative of the site, could also pick up all the records from the day in one format. A good demonstration of what a useful tool Living Record can be for these sort of events!

For the afternoon, several of us moved on to Lytchett Bay where we spent a few hours investigating the easternmost section of heathland and associated ditch system. Since suggesting a DFG visit to this new site at the start of the year it has subsequently been well recorded by Jim White (many thanks Jim!) in conjunction with volunteers from The Great Heath project – many of whom are fairly new to plant recording and could perhaps be future members of DFG – so our contribution to the grid square recording and site knowledge was less significant here. However, it did give people a chance to see some unusual species for Dorset (a good run of Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus* along the ditches and a nice patch of White-beak Sedge *Rhynchospora alba* tucked into a hollow in the centre of the block).

26th–27th August 2015 Ringstead Bay Laurence Taylor and John Newbould

The meeting, scheduled to take place on the 26th August, was cancelled due to torrential rain and unsafe conditions. Laurence Taylor and John Newbould subsequently undertook the survey along the cliff line in SY7581 and SY7681. Access to the shingle beach is via steps on National Trust land just east of the village.

The cliffs of the western portion are the black Kimmeridge clays with many of the rocks having fossilised exposures revealing oyster and mussel beds, along with many other marine fossils. Generally, the flora of these clay beds contain opportunistic species such as Spear-leaved Orache *Atriplex prostrata*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, Bristly Oxtongue

Ringstead Bay. John Newbould





Surveying for Autumn Lady's-tresses (in foreground) at Westhay Farm in September. John Newbould

Picris echioides, Sea Mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum* and Hedge Mustard *Sisymbrium officinale*. There are a few patches of Reed *Phragmites australis*, Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus*, Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus* and, more rarely, Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*. Colt's-foot *Tussilago farfara* and Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris* were scarce in one area, forming what is nearest to the *Atriplex prostrata* – *Beta vulgaris* MC6 maritime community.

The upper slopes are more stable, but although prone to slippage, are mainly scrub covered, with Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* fairly dominant and there is an occasional Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, willows *Salix*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*.

Moving into square SY7681, the upper cliffs become more stable composed of an outcrop of the Portland beds. Here there are two immediate significant differences. The cliffs have streams supplying freshwater to the beach. Here, Common Reed was accompanied by interspersed Sea club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus* described by Bowen (2000) as typically found in the mouth of streams between Lyme Regis and Ringstead Bay. Brookweed *Samolus valerandi*, another spring line plant, was growing amongst the reed.

The shingle adjacent to the cliff is more stable with a community dominated in places by Spear-leaved Orache, but contains Sea Kale *Cakile maritima*, Yellow Horned-poppy *Glaucum flavum* and rarely Portland Spurge *Euphorbia portlandica*, forming a small *Honkenya peploides* – *Cakile maritima* SD2 NVC community. The Sea Kale has an extensive horizontal and vertical tap root system, which allowed the plant to survive the violent storms at Cogden in January and February 2014. Its location here is sheltered from cold northerly winds, which it prefers to avoid. It gets full sun from its south westerly facing position and, with

the calcareous sea cliffs behind and in a well draining medium growing conditions, should do well.

Other plants of interest here included Viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare*, which is also found adjacent to the footpath to White Nothe, Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum*, Buck'shorn Plantain *Plantago coronopus*, Distant Sedge *Carex distans* and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. This section contained a small area of coastal grassland on the cliffs, which we did not survey.

17th June and 9th September 2015 Slepe Heath Leader David Brown Report John Newbould

David Brown reports that on 9th September, 17 botanists again divided into four groups, but this time concentrated on the numerous valley mires and wet heaths that occur on Slepe's northern slopes. Over the two days we recorded 173 vascular plant and 49 bryophyte species, and given that there are virtually no documented records for the site since the early 1980s this is a fantastic step towards being able to make informed decisions on the best ways to manage the site.

We recorded a small, species-rich area of Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* – rush pasture on a roadside verge together with an adjacent pond beside the Arne triangle (SY955865), extending through the fence-line and on to the heathland. With care, this patch could be extended south into the heath.

The pond measures some 30m x 10m and is not easy to see from the road. It appears to be oligotrophic with Broad-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton natans* covering some 40% of the surface. Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris* was present along the margins. Creeping Willow *Salix repens* was found on the eastern margin together with Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*

and Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus*. Both Azure and Large Red Damselflies were present in numbers on the June visit. The pond was revisited on 9th September 2015 at around 2.00p.m. in warm sun. On this occasion Migrant Hawker and Ruddy Darter were recorded.

Purple Moor-grass was located through the fence, but the verge had Quaking-grass *Briza media*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Pill Sedge *C. pilulifera* and Common Sedge *C. nigra*, together with Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*. There were many Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and probably small numbers of Southern Marsh-orchids *D. praetermissa*, but these could have been hybrids. Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *L. pedunculatus* were present here also. During the September visit, the verge had Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Lesser Hawkbit *Leontodon saxatilis* and a straggly eyebright, which keyed out as *Euphrasia micrantha*. Bowen (2000) reported this species from the Arne Triangle with records from 1913 and 1988.

Report David Brown

The best records probably came from the mires and wet heaths. As well as recording species lists for each of the M21 Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* – *Sphagnum pulchrum* mires, we were able to map all the Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe*, Brown Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca*, Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Early Marsh-orchid *D. incarnata* plants individually. The wet heaths, where Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Dorset Heath *E. ciliaris* are common (and their hybrid *E. x watsonii*), are a particular feature for Silver-studded Blue butterflies, with several hundred recorded one day in June.

The heaths on the former forestry plantation land are very early succession, and over large areas Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii* and Purple Moor-grass are more dominant than Heather *Calluna vulgaris*. The open nature of these heaths, with considerable disturbance and bare ground partly explain why it is proving to be the best National Trust site in Purbeck for several rare and protected heathland specialist animals, including Woodlark and Heath Tiger Beetle. The most interesting dry heath plants were found on the sites of the old bonfires where the forestry brash had been burned. Small Cudweed *Filago minima*, Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus* and Shepherd's purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris* were all found on several old burn sites.

2nd September 2015 Westhay Farm to survey for Autumn Lady's-tresses Leader John Newbould

Autumn Lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* was recorded at in field 27 Ridge Goyle SY3888002847 on 11th September 2008; confirming a 1981 record of Niall (Lister & Foster (1996), by

Jon Campbell and John Newbould (JAN). Subsequently 15 spikes were recorded in an adjacent area and 50 spikes in the above place when JAN undertook a quick walk-over survey on 1st September 2014. He also recorded Autumn Lady's-tresses in nine further fields mainly adjacent to the Southwest Coast Footpath. In 2015, with the help of Dorset Flora Group, a more detailed survey was undertaken covering 13 fields.

The results of the flowering spike count for 2014 and 2015 are as follows:

Grid Ref	Field name no	2014 count	2015 count
SY382929	Field 12 Hatchett Plot	nil	230
SY383928	Field 13 Dairy's Mead	100	500
SY383927	Field 15 Water Mead	20	200 plus
SY385929	Field 16 Great Mead+	n/s	16
SY385931	Field 17 Sydling Close+	2	20
SY386926	Field 18 (west) Cowleaze	16	40
SY387926	Field 18 (east) Little Midlands	nil	1000
SY386926	Undercliff south of field 18	nil	20
SY385928	Field 19 (west) New Mead	nil	1000
SY387927	Field 19 (east) Long Strap	nil	300
SY386929	Field 20 Boiling Close	n/s	35
SY386930	Field 21 Little Hod	4	70
SY387932	Field 22 Furzey Hod	nil	35
SY386936	Field 23 Midland	7	70
SY388933	Field 25 Great Hod	14	57
SY388927	Field 26 Wheat Close & Elms Close	20	70
SY389928	Field 27 Ridge Goyle	65	600

+ in September 2015, fields 16 and 17 had been closely mown before the survey and were being grazed by cattle. There was evidence of some plants losing their flowering spikes. There were very few flowering herbs as a result. n/s = not surveyed.

21st October 2015 Annual Fungus foray at Thorncombe Wood with Bryan Edwards Report John Newbould

In torrential rain four members joined Bryan Edwards at the Thorncombe car park. We were not expecting to see many species, as the previous month had been so dry. Bryan led us down mysterious pathways where often it was so dark that Laurence Taylor produced his torch revealing small fungi growing on the leaf litter. Bryan recorded some 30 species with a few new to Thorncombe Wood, which has been well worked both by this group in 2013 when we recorded some 70 species and by the British Mycological Society. I probably failed to keep up, as my list had only 23 species, but included Yellow Stag's-horn *Calocera viscosa* and Brown Birch-bolete *Leccinum scabrum*. We recorded a number of bracket fungi including Birch Polypore *Piptoporus betulinus* and Lumpy Bracket *Trametes gibbosa*. The porcelain fungus *Oudemansiella mucidi* on Beech *Fagus sylvatica* was not as well developed as on our 2013 visit.

In the dark, Bryan did well to spot the rust fungus *Melampsora hypericum* on Tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum*. For me the easiest fungus to record was the witch's broom *Taphina betulae* on Silver Birch *Betula pendula*.

Dorset Wild Flower Week reports 2015

May 23rd

Kingcombe Arts Weekend

This was one of the most successful events run at Kingcombe for some time! With all the building work finished, new car park and the new Swallow Barn Studio unofficially launched on Friday night, it represents a bit of a turning point in Kingcombe 2015 and beyond! The weekend exceeded all my expectations and managed to achieve so much in terms of engaging new and existing audiences, providing an opportunity to fundraise for the important work of Dorset Wildlife Trust, supporting local artists and celebrating Kingcombe's connections to the landscape and the arts.

Some of the highlights:

- Estimated visitors were somewhere between 650 and 750 over three days.
- Over the weekend seven of the 11 artists were in attendance with five demonstrating their techniques, inspiring people to book onto courses.
- A fabulous children's activities tent with crafts and such like, absolutely loved by the children with many repeat visitors.
- A great self-guided walk which was taken up by dozens of people.

Nicola Hawkins

The walk at Powerstock Common with Jim White.



Powerstock Common

Unlike last year's walk here, we enjoyed near perfect weather. Perhaps as a result, the total of walkers numbered 34. We set off along the massive, terraced railway cutting, slicing deep into the Fullers Earth Clay, with its surprising array of chalk-loving flora. Salad Burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*, Stemless Thistle *Cirsium acaule* and Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* were frequent along with Quaking-grass *Briza media* and Downy Oat-grass *Avenula pubescens*. The sun had brought out flowers of Common Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, but we were too early for most orchids except abundant Twayblades *Neottia ovata*.

Climbing up the cutting, through damp woodland, brought us to a superb heathy turf, spotting on the way Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* and, concealed in the leaf litter, a spike of Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*. The heath field was rich in sedges – Carnation *Carex panicea*, Flea *C. pulicaris*, Glaucous *C. flacca* and Tawny *C. hostiana* Sedges – along with Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, Bugle *Ajuga reptans* and Bitter-vetch *Lathyrus linifolius* and, still in bud, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*. A few of the many Heath Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* were just breaking into flower and the herb-rich turf had much Betony *Betonica officinalis*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, all to flower later. We also saw several fine plants of Petty Whin *Genista anglica*.

Jim White

Stanpit Marsh

An unexpected highlight of the walk at Stanpit Marsh in the morning was the red carpet of Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* on the sandy rise of Crouch Hill, and accompanying it was both Sand Spurrey *Spergularia rubra* and Common Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*. On the wetter parts of the marsh various sedge *Carex* species were observed as well as plentiful Celery-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus* and, in one small area, English Scurvygrass *Cochlearia anglica*. I explained key identification features and past uses of these plants and other species found on the recreation ground nearby. Despite the sunny weather only four ladies turned up for this walk.

Phil Budd

Nea Meadows, Christchurch

In the afternoon the weather was still fine at Nea Meadows, but there were only three members of the public in attendance. Nevertheless, a good variety of flowers and insects were seen. The two flora highlights here were Star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogalum angustifolium*, not far from the Bowling Green, and Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* on the main meadow. The latter was, unfortunately, past its best. One of the rangers explained that it was the first of this species seen there in six years. Again, I explained the identification features and past uses of these plants, elaborating on what is edible or otherwise. A few new species were found on the site, including Golden-scaled Male-fern *Dryopteris affinis*.

Phil Budd

Hilfield Friary Meadows and lane

The Hilfield Friary Community were pleased to welcome 19 for our inaugural walk. A range of habitats were visited with varied flora. First, we headed across our restoration field, which is in the process of becoming a wildflower meadow. Species of interest included Twayblades *Neottia ovata* and rosettes of Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. The presence and role of Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* were noted, there were several trefoils, sorrels, hawkbits and mouse-ears. The walk then progressed to the established Bottom Field. Woodland species were observed along the laid hedge including Bugle *Ajuga reptans* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. Over the lower section it was good to find Common Broomrape *Orobancha minor* in with the clover. As we progressed to the upper terrace there was an abundance of Twayblades and Common Spotted-orchids with Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Common Vicia *sativa* and Tufted Vetch *V. cracca* and very little grass in the sward. There was excitement on finding Fly Orchid *Ophrys insectifera* and a mixture of Southern Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* hybridised with Common Spotted-orchid *D. fuchsii*.

Leaving the meadow, the bank along the hedgerow yielded an abundance of species indicative of ancient woodland. The Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* attracted particular attention,

along with a clump of Bird's-Nest Orchids *Neottia nidus-avis* and another of Fly Orchid. Although most of the ten species of orchid recorded were not out yet, it was nice to have a saprophyte and parasite theme with the Yellow-rattle, Toothwort, Bird's-Nest Orchid and Common Broomrape. After tea most left but some went on to Hermits Wood, a small area of wet woodland. There we saw Greater Tussock *Carex paniculata*, Pendulous *C. pendula*, Wood *C. sylvatica* and Remote *C. remota* Sedges. Flowering plants of interest included Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*, Ground Ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, Three-Nerved Sandwort *Moehringia trinervia*, Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and Fool's-water-cress *Apium nodiflorum*. The walk concluded with a visit to a large popular tree believed to be a native Black-poplar *Populus nigra betulifolia*; samples were collected for positive identification.

Richard Thornbury

May 24th

Townsend, Swanage

The Townsend Reserve walk, led in favourable weather had nine participants. After being shown a number of common, though confusing species such as Bulbous Buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, Common Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum* and Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*, as well as the many Cowslips *Primula veris*, the group was taken to several of the mounds, where David pointed out the Nationally Scarce Dwarf Mouse-ear *Cerastium pumilum* and explained the differences between this and other similar species. Rough Clover *Trifolium scabrum* was an unexpected bonus here. The nearby 'Orchid Bastion' still had a few Early Spider-orchids *Ophrys sphegodes* (another Nationally Scarce species) that had not gone to seed, with plenty of Burnet Rose *Rosa spinosissima* coming into flower. A Small Blue provided one of the few butterfly sightings of the morning. After admiring some Early Purple Orchids *Orchis mascula*, David led the group along the main north-westerly track, pointing out Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and various common grasses. The Hairy-fruited Cornsalad *Valerianella eriocarpa* site was passed, but no plants were showing because of the overgrown conditions. Twayblade *Neottia ovata* spikes were seen in two areas, though several appeared to have been damaged by slugs. At the end of the track Star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogalum angustifolium* was showing very well and seems to have benefited from the tree clearance. The group then retraced their steps, with one detour to look at four cotoneaster species.

David Leadbetter

Durlston Country Park, Swanage

There were only four of us on the afternoon Durlston walk (whereas there had been nearly 20 on the same walk two weeks before). We saw various garden escapes on the road up from the castle. In the car park there were interesting species by the kerbs, including Field Madder *Sherardia arvensis*, Crosswort

Cruciata laevipes and Knotted Hedge-parsley *Torilis nodosa*. Crossing South Field, a hay meadow, a few flowers of Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus* and Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* were showing. By the shallow quarry in Saxon Field we saw Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Chalk Milkwort *Polygala calcarea* and Early Gentian *Gentianella anglica*, with some late Early Purple Orchids *Orchis mascula* beyond. Through the next gate Pale Flax *Linum bienne* and Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia exigua* were in flower on the spoil heap. Ox-eye Daisies *Leucanthemum vulgare* were only just coming out in Ox-eye Field, and Sainfoin *Onobrychis viciifolia* likewise in the south end of South Field.

Edward Pratt

May 25th

Badbury Rings



Walkers at Badbury Rings.

The 14 participants had a 2 hour 30 minute walk in sunshine. This year flowers were late, and far fewer Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* were in flower than last year and no Pyramidal *Anacamptis pyramidalis* or Chalk Fragrant *Gymnadenia conopsea* Orchids were seen, although Twayblades *Neottia ovata* were numerous and flowering. We saw quite a few Greater Butterfly-orchids *Platanthera chlorantha*, but hardly any had open florets. Chalk Milkwort *Polygala calcarea* was flowering profusely, in places in multiple colour shades. We found the elusive Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum* very close to the National Trust tractor tracks. No Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* were found, but there were still a few Early Purple Orchids *Orchis mascula* out; Wild Mignonette *Reseda lutea*, Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale*, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Thyme-leaved Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia* and other chalkland flowers were admired, despite the poor season. Dingy and Grizzled Skippers had finished, but we had good views of

Yellow Shell and Fox Moth. Participants were very pleased with their walk.

David & Margaret Godfrey

Winfrith and Tadnoll

Twelve people assembled at Winfrith for an introductory talk and saw two Green Hairstreaks feeding on a Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*.

The group moved on to the drier part of the heath where we saw Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor*, Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii* and Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*. As the group was small the leader took them to see the Bog Orchids *Hammarbya paludosa*, which are still hanging on near this area. Over the last four years the numbers have remained about the same (30-50), though several smaller patches have now gone. We saw Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*, Round- and Oblong-leaved Sundews *Drosera rotundifolia*, *D. intermedia* and the usual quantity of Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*.

We then moved through to a drier part to look at the annuals on the sandy tracks. These included Small-flowered Buttercup *Ranunculus parviflorus*, in a much larger area than last year; Mossy Stonecrop *Crassula tillaea*, Bird's-foot Clover *Trifolium ornithopodiodes*, Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, Squirrel-tail Fescue *Vulpia bromoides*, Common Storksbill *Erodium cicutarium*, and Common Centaury *Centaurea erythraea*, before moving along the track to see a large patch of Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis*. In the ditches we saw Broad Buckler *Dryopteris dilatata*, Hard *Blechnum spicant*, Hart's-tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium* and Golden Scaly Male *Dryopteris affinis* Ferns. Back on the heath we passed a small patch of White *Rhynchospora alba* and Brown Beak-sedge *R. fusca*, along with several groups of Petty Whin *Genista anglica*, mostly in flower (best year yet for this), Deergrass *Trichophorum germanicum* and Many-stalked Spike-rush *Eleocharis multicaulis*.

We stopped for lunch here as several of the group needed to leave. After we moved on to the north side of the heath passing Flea *Carex pulicaris*, Star *C. echinata*, Carnation *C. panicea*, Green-ribbed *C. binervis*, and Common Yellow *C. demissa* Sedges. Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* was still in flower and just starting were the Early Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza incarnata* ssp. *pulchella*.

So as not to disturb the nesting Lapwings we moved onto the path proper and made our way to the wet meadows. Good displays of Floating Sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*, Marsh Foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Common *Lemna minor* and Least Duckweed *L. minuta*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Round *Ranunculus omiophyllus* and Ivy-leaved Crowfoot *R. hederaceus*. In the stream itself we saw a Stream Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus* ssp. *pseudofluitans*, most of it in flower. From the river we moved back to look at the scrapes where

we saw several thousand Pillwort *Pilularia globulifera*, Water-cress *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*, and Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*. Looking into the water the leader pointed out the bright orange oogoniums on the Dark Stonewort *Nitella opaca*. On the way back to the cars we saw a black fungus called Black Helvella *Helvella lacunosa*.

Many thanks to the Dorset Wildlife Trust for supplying new maps to these sites.

Laurence Taylor

May 27th

Kingcombe Meadows

Nick Gray and I had a great day for the walk: the sun was shining and Kingcombe birds were in great voice. Our group of 22 met at The Kingcombe Centre and set off into the reserve.

First, we walked the short walk up Mount Pleasant Lane an ancient drovers route into the centre of the reserve. The lane was dotted with Early Purple *Orchis mascula* and Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and we were lucky enough to still have a few Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, nodding their heads in the dappled light. The flowers of Kingcombe's neutral meadows were admired and folklore relating to their names and beneficial properties discussed. Bumblebees, other pollinators and bats were talked about, as well as the virtues of organic stock and dung alive with beetles and fly larva.

The walk finished with a stunning array of Southern Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* as well as Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Corky-fruited Water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*, Ox-eye Daisies *Leucanthemum vulgare* and Quaking-grass *Briza media* in Adder's Plot, which is always an exciting field to visit at this time of year.

Emily Newton

Cogden Meadows

Ten people booked. Four last minute phone bookings refused. Six turned up without booking. Highlights were good numbers of Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*; the Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* population has expanded; the shingle beach was in good condition in spite of the 2014 storms. Thrift *Armeria maritima* was plentiful; Sea Kale *Crambe maritima* and Yellow Horned-poppy *Glaucum flavum* was doing well.

John Newbould

May 28th

North Holes Bay Shore

The 12 participants spent a little while searching for emerging Parsley Water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii*, confusingly amidst Pignut *Conopodium majus* leaves and Hemlock Water-dropwort *O. crocata* nearby. A specimen was taken in view of some scepticism, and has been confirmed as *Oenanthe lachenalii*

by Bryan Edwards. This is important because it is hoped to persuade the Upton Country Park staff not to mow it in the early summer. There was much of interest in the Pignut-dominated flora of the woodland bordering the saltmarsh, and new finds were Celery-leaved Crowfoot *Ranunculus sceleratus* in a small marsh and two plants of a flax with deep blue petals, differing from the profuse Pale Flax *Linum bienne* seen later in the shore meadows. The rich saltmarsh flora was greatly appreciated, and its value emphasised for encouraging botanical study on the land acquired in the Great Heath Project. After traversing the narrow strip by the metalled cycle path, nine participants departed, and left only three to enjoy a profuse show of flowering Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* in a small unmown meadow.

We also saw a great expanse of Black Mustard *Brassica nigra* fringing the shore, and Weld *Reseda luteola* and Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* in flower. The late spring weather was probably the reason why no Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* were flowering, and the Clustered *Trifolium glomeratum* and Knotted Clovers *T. striatum* seen in 2014 could not be found, although Subterranean Clover *T. subterraneum* was flowering. The 4km walk lasted 2 ¾ hours.

David & Margaret Godfrey

Studland Heath

Three people joined the Cyril Diver Project survey team in response to the Dorset Wild Flower Week invitation for others to join it for the day.

On the way to War Hill, the site of a World War Two pillbox ruin, we examined some old species sites by the path and by Little Sea. We then surveyed the north-west outlier at War Hill before the main site. After we had listed other species, I described Smooth Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris glabra* and a visitor was the first to spot it; nearly 20 were flowering. Then we moved to the main site, which had been mostly cleared of Gorse in March. The clearance had been too recent for all the species formerly there to have a chance of reappearing, but we made a reasonable list, including 11 new species.

As we sat down to lunch we saw black smoke some way further north, and soon heard the sounds of fire engines and police cars, and wondered how that would be affecting the other survey team. Then we walked on to East Heath Pines. This had been surveyed in late summer previously, so there might have been early flowers to be recorded, but there were not. We did find six 'lost' species and two new ones, but the compartment is one of the dullest. On the way back we successfully located an old site for Small Cudweed *Filago minima* by the Heather Walk.

The smoke proved to be from a burning campervan and car, close by Ferry Road, necessitating road closure and consequent revision of our other team's plans!

Edward Pratt

Chesil Beach, near Abbotsbury



The group assembled behind Sea Kale.

A fine attendance of 23 set off on a pleasant morning from Abbotsbury Beach car park towards the north-west end of the Fleet lagoon, walking along the base of the landward-facing slope of the mighty Chesil Beach, reputedly the longest unbroken length of beach shingle in the world. We saw a range of plants adapted to the rigorous coastal conditions, including Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima*, Sea Campion *Silene uniflora* and Danish Scurvy-grass *Cochlearia danica*, before we enjoyed the spectacle of two classic Chesil shingle specialists in flower; the Nationally Scarce Sea Pea *Lathyrus japonica* and Sea Kale *Crambe maritima*. The group assembled for a photo behind one splendid specimen of the latter species, and our walk benefited from the activities of a recent Dorset beach-clean day, which had left the beach unusually clear of litter.

Further along and close to the reedbed that occurs behind the beach we found another Nationally Scarce but much less conspicuous plant, Divided Sedge *Carex divisa*, and other small coastal plants seen nearby included Sea Pearlwort *Sagina maritima* and Sea Mouse-ear *Cerastium diffusum*. Dormant seeds disturbed by ditch-clearance works may have been the source of several plants of Wild Celery *Apium graveolens* observed. A narrow length of saltmarsh near the Fleet supported sturdy bushes of Shrubby Sea-blite *Suaeda vera*, also Nationally Scarce, plus a fine patch of Sea Arrow-grass *Triglochin maritima*.

Back at the car park a number of the attendees elected to join a brief foray in the opposite direction to see our fourth Nationally Scarce species of the morning, the impressively tall Babington's Leek *Allium ampeloprasum* var. *babingtonii*, accompanied by the introduced Rosy Garlic *Allium roseum* with its pink flowers blowing cheerfully in the sea breeze, a pleasing end to an enjoyable excursion.

Jonathan Cox

May 29th

Fontmell Down

With one dedicated soul braving the wind and predicted onslaught of rain, our planned ramble around the downs was shortened to a targeted search for White Helleborine, *Cephalanthera damasonium*, that we hoped would be just coming into flower. Although our traverse of the site revealed some of the expected range of downland flowers, the season seemed to be rather behind, with many only just showing signs of flowering, and only a few spikes of Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and one or two Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* on show in terms of the usual display of orchids. White Helleborines having been spotted – count of 7 in the wooded strip on the south-west slope, Little Down – the rain duly arrived in sufficient quantity to give us a thorough soaking so we called it a day, although we did have the highlight of a few Early Gentians, *Gentianella anglica*, on our way back.

Amber Rosenthal

Corfe Charity Meadows



Amongst the buttercups of Corfe Charity Meadows.

Nine of us assembled for this walk, the rain having stopped just beforehand. We set off across the grass fields which are reverting to heathland, and saw Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* and Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis*, among other species. On reaching the damp hay meadows Southern Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* were soon found, followed by Ragged Robin *Silene flos-cuculi* and Oval Sedge *Carex leporina*. There was a wonderful display of Meadow Buttercups *Ranunculus acris*. By a drier meadow we visited the ruins of a pre-war cottage and saw leaves of a globe thistle *Echinops*, which has persisted for over 70 years, and some apple trees nearby.

In the final meadow Corky-fruited Water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* was in bud. We concluded with a view of Wall Pennywort *Umbilicus rupestris* and Common Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria muralis* in a hedge.

Edward Pratt

May 30th**Stoborough Heath**

We had a fine morning for the walk, but only 12 participants. We got a taste of two main habitats: semi-improved grassland (former heath) but gradually becoming more herb-rich, and damp/wet heathland. The fields had a fair selection of common grasses, sedges and herbs. Heavily grazed patches had several weeds of open, acid soils – Corn Spurrey *Spergula arvensis*, Sand Spurrey *Spergularia rubra*, Scentless Mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum* and Small-flowered Cranesbill *Geranium pusillum*, with Bristle Club-rush *Isolepis setacea* in damper spots.

The heath east of the embankment had all four heathers to be found in Purbeck, along with a locally very short, rabbit-grazed turf with abundant Carnation *Carex panicea* and Common Yellow-sedges *C. demissa*. Other sedges included Flea *C. pulicaris*, Pill *C. pilulifera* and Green-ribbed *C. binervis*, along with Bristle-bent *Agrostis curtisii* and Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*. Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris* were showy, but the diminutive Allseed *Radiola linoides* took some spotting. Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* were obvious, but several fine stands of Early Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* ssp. *pulchella* stole the show, including one or two hybrids. Bare peaty hollows had Round *Drosera rotundifolia* and Oblong-leaved *D. intermedia* Sundews and Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*.

The return walk along the old clay tramway added four common ferns, along with a fine display of Burnet Rose *Rosa spinosissima*.

Jim White

Hardy's Cottage Bioblitz

Five volunteers through the day. Between 100-200 people. Moth-trapping was awful. Star flower was Star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogalum angustifolium*. We had a bee swarm. See report on page 13.

John Newbould

May 31st**Kilwood and Stonehill Down**

We made an early start to the walk around Kilwood as the rain was holding off at that point. Three Flora Group members joined the leader Jon Crewe and were soon stretching his rather rusty botany. The track down to the reserve has some good wayside flowers and a numbers of sedges were also seen, including Wood Sedge *Carex sylvatica* and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca*. We walked through the meadows, finding Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* just coming into flower and Heath Spotted-orchid, *D. maculata* almost fully out, a little further into the damper area. We went into the woodland area as well, where there were the leaves of Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and some Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* still in flower.

We were joined by one more enthusiast as we left the wood to return and spent some time comparing the individual flowers of the different orchids, including a very worn Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula* that was just hanging on. We returned to the parking point for a brief refreshment break.

After taking some fuel on board we headed for Stonehill Down. We enjoyed a steep climb up the hill, with abundant Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, and Bird's-foot Clover *Trifolium ornithopodioides*. The top of the down did not yield any orchid finds. Although a pleasant walk it is not as rich as might be expected, but the views do compensate.

We returned a little above the central track in the valley, which is very lush and lacking in flowers. The north-facing slope had Early Purple Orchids *Orchis mascula* in good numbers and condition, held back by cooler conditions. On the south-facing side there were some good patches of Hounds-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale* and a few small plants of Long-stalked Cranesbill *Geranium columbinum*. Further up the down Common Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* occurs, but we were not quite keen enough to clamber up again on this occasion. Butterflies were becoming active as the sun replaced the earlier drizzle and we found Dingy Skipper, Small Heath and three slightly worn Adonis Blues on some dung, with other blues also present but on the move. The walk ended at 1:30pm in bright sunshine.

Jon Crewe

Field meetings and workshops 2016

**Moors Valley Country Park recording day,
Monday 9th May 10.30am – 4pm.
Organiser Robin Walls (DFG) with Sara
Tschersich (MVCP).**

Meet at the Visitor Centre BH24 2ET, entrance approximately SU105056. There is a large car park and Monday is a quiet day. The system records your car number on entry; you pay to get out or get a free pass as we have been promised. This will be sorted out when we meet. We will record a variety of grassland habitat in this park on the vice-county border. If there is time we may also record some of the woodland. We will be joined by some of the rangers and the day will be partly instructional, as well as collecting much needed species and vegetation data. Wellies advisable for the wetter sites, although much can be done in 'stout shoes'.

Contact for booking: Robin Walls. 01305 852444 or
robin@rmwalls.plus.com.

**Recording day for the BSBI 2020 Atlas
Sunday 15th May at Ashmore, North Dorset
Led by Andrew Branson and Robin Walls**

We will meet at 10am by the Ashmore village pond in the centre of the village; grid ref. ST913178. The north of Dorset is still comparatively under-recorded, with most records being rather old. This meeting will be a chance to fill in some gaps in the Cranborne Chase area. There is a mix of extensive woodland and semi-improved pasture, including some chalk grassland slopes, as well as some unexplored footpaths, in this quiet corner of Dorset. We will meet back at Ashmore by 4pm.

The day will be based at Ashmore, but if enough people attend we may split into groups in order to cover as many squares as possible. Bring a packed lunch and wear sturdy boots as it may well be muddy under foot.

Contact for booking: Andrew Branson,
email: andrew@3alpacos.co.uk; tel: 01747 838223.

Wild Flower Week 28th May – 5th June

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) 10.00am – 4.30pm
Led by Amber Rosenthal**

A small team of people is sought to help with a repeat survey of the Early Gentians at this site, to be scheduled around peak flowering and suitable weather. Final arrangements will be made closer to the time. The survey is likely to be run over one or two full days (attending both days not necessary) 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 see www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/fontmelldownnaturereserve.html or to register your interest please contact Amber on 01305 217984;
email: arosenthal@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

**Grasses workshop
Saturday 9th July at Dorset Wildlife Trust
Headquarters at Brooklands Farm, Forston,
Dorchester, DT2 7AA. 10.30am-4pm
Led by Robin Walls and Amber Rosenthal**

Still unsure about some of those grasses you keep coming across? This is a great chance to get to grips with some of Dorset's common grasses and add that extra dimension to your recording skills. If you have copy of the *Streeter Collins Flower Guide* or other guides, e.g. Rose, please bring this. There will be light refreshments but bring a packed lunch. For directions see www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/Brooklands_Farm_Nature_Reserve_and_Centre.html.

Numbers are limited so please book;
contact Amber tel: 01305 217984;
email: arosenthal@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk.

**Tadnoll Meadows recording & mapping day,
Saturday 25th June 10am-3pm.
Organiser Amber Rosenthal, DWT**

Meet at the Tadnoll entrance/ parking area of the DWT reserve at SY791875. This is a opportunity to remap the rush-pasture habitats and repeat the 1995 NVC quadrats, for those who are able to take this on, in order to assess whether the areas of interest have changed. It will also be a chance to see some nice wetland species (such as marsh cinquefoil) for those who just want to explore the site. Wellies advisable.

For directions see <http://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/tadnollwinfrithsnaturereserve.html> Contact on the day in case of poor weather etc. Amber on 07917 171427.

Sovell Down roses workshop and general recording day.

Saturday 10th September, 10.30am – 2.30pm.
Organiser Amber Rosenthal

Meet at the roadside ST99361093 just before Gussage All Saints.
 Directons: www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/sovell_down_reserve

Sovell Down DWT reserve has a range of roses growing in the hedges and as field scrub, including the Nationally Scarce Small-Leaved Sweet Briar *Rosa agrestis*. Ted Pratt has kindly agreed to give us some guidance on separating the species and the aim is that, where possible, we will use our skills to tag specimens so that scrub work at the site can be targeted to protect a range of specimens whilst preventing encroachment of scrub into the species-rich grassland. There is a range of other interesting plants at the site for additional general recording. If anyone has a copy of the BSBI rose handbook (No. 7. *Roses of Great Britain and Ireland*. G.G. Graham & A.L. Primavesi, 1993) please do bring it along. Please also bring secateurs and plastic bags (and stout gloves) if you wish to collect some samples for future reference.

Booking required since parking is limited, please contact Amber tel. 01305 217984; email: arosenthal@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk.

Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society field meeting programme 2016

21st April High Wood, Badbury Rings . Meet at 10.30am in the Badbury Rings Car park ST961032.

2nd May Westhay Farm for Green-winged Orchids.
 Guided walks at 10.00am and 2.00pm from the Stonebarrow shop SY381933. Numbers limited to ten per session. Booking via National Trust West Dorset on 01297 489481.

14th May Cerne Abbas for calcareous grassland with potential for Duke of Burgundy and Marsh Fritillary butterflies. Meet in the car park opposite the village hall SY663015 at 10.30am (please note this is not the Cerne Giant viewing car park). Take the road into the village and first left.

11th June Ringstead to Lulworth. Meet at 10.30am at the east end of the Ringstead National Trust car park SY766817. Please book with John Newbould on 01305 837384 as we will need to get some cars to Lulworth for the return journey.

5th July National Meadows Day – Open day at Westhay Farm with West Dorset National Trust. 10.00am – 4.00pm. Parking by the Stonebarrow shop. Follow signed path to Westhay Farm. A series of public walks to look at the fabulous neutral grassland meadows and explain the careful management needed to maintain them. Telephone 01297 489481 for information.

9th July Garden Bioblitz at Hardy's Cottage. 11.00am to 5.00pm. If you can help, please contact John Newbould. Normal visiting charges apply. NT members free. Parking at the Thorncombe Woods Visitor Centre.

16th July 2016 Wareham Commons. Meet at 10.30am. Turn left from the roundabout on Monmouth Road then left again SY917874 to explore the wet ditches associated with the River Piddle.

West Dorset National Trust

Tuesdays from 26th April to 7th June 2016 (except 31st May spring bank holiday week when traffic is difficult)

Surveying the fields around Shedbush Farm and St Gabriel's. Objective is to undertake a field-by-field survey to provide information for the estate Management Plan. Meet in the yard at Filcombe Farm SY407928. For more information contact John Newbould. Meet at 9.30am. On suitable nights I propose to run a moth-trap over night.

The National Trust welcomes people with entomological and birdwatching skills, as well as botanists.

Purbeck National Trust

Botanical survey days will be taking place across the estate each Thursday. To register an interest please email: michelle.brown1@nationaltrust.org.uk. She usually emails the location on the Monday or Tuesday before in order that the weather may be checked.

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

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