



LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

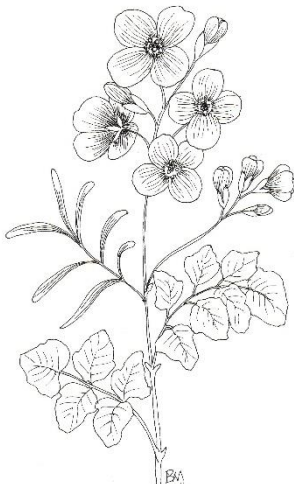
NEWSletter

Issue No 209

August 2023

The between times...

Just to finish off what was not completed on the March work day, the Wednesday team completed trimming of the previously laid hedge along the south side of Orchard Meadow on March 29th. The stuffing of the material back into this year's laid hedge was also completed. It was very muddy and I was glad to have all that work done so the path could have time to recover before the summer walkers came along.



Milkmaids

I did notice that some of the milkmaids were opening but we still hadn't moved the grass from where they usually have their stronghold in the Flower Meadow. This of course will have presented them with a huge problem as they probably can't fight their way through so much grass. I resolved to remove the grass as soon as possible and just hope that the delay has not caused the demise of the maids

On the 5th April the Wednesday team were there again, this time removing said pile of grass that was left in the Flower Meadow from when the meadow was cut last summer. It was interesting work as the top centimetre was bone dry. Then there was a 5-7 cm layer of wet but composting grass with worms and other bugs in it. There were also several types of fungus growing such as sulphur tuft and puff ball plus some slime moulds which had spread through the whole wet course. The remainder was bone dry cut grass almost down to the ground but very densely packed so it was difficult to rake or fork it out. At the bottom of this there was a thin layer of sludge where the damp from the soil had penetrated upwards and again it was riddled with worms and fungus.

There was a four inch round passage, partly lined with mud, which meandered through some of the bottom layers ending in a snug. This could have been the work of rats but I wonder if a hedgehog had hibernated there. The hole seemed too large for a rat but just right for hedgehogs. I also felt that if it had been rats they would probably have still been resident when we started work as they would already have started producing young. The grass piles would have made a very fine secluded home for them, but without DNA testing I don't think we will ever know who the builder was.

There was a very attentive robin who picked over the freshly opened areas when we were away distributing the spoil. Some of the spoil was placed on the meadow itself to alleviate some of the excessive damp at the gate, while the rest was dumped in the hedge to rot down as was originally intended when the grass was cut in the first place. On the 12th April the Wednesday team continued removing the grass and eventually finished the job just before the wind and the rain set in. We were greatly encouraged by two robins who were quite insistent that we deliver up all the worms for them to eat. The blackthorn hedge between the Flower Meadow and the allotments finally came into full bloom forming a beautiful white curtain along the west path.

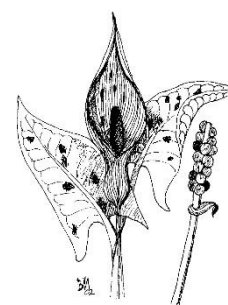
April 19th dawned fine and sunny but by the time we Wednesday workers arrived in the reserve it was cloudy with a sharp north-east wind. We started on moving the woodchip in the car park to Muddy Way to try and reduce the sogginess of that area. It was interesting work as we found a toad in the wood chip and there was a mouse running around where we were working on Muddy Way. The robins were keen on the turned-over chips and were quite happy to come within a foot or so of us as we worked.

My bees were quite busy that morning in spite of the wind and there were lots of whirligigs on the Wetland. I saw an orange tip butterfly and a pair of fighting peacock butterflies in the afternoon when it was a bit more sunny. The milkmaids were in bloom on the east side of the meadow, lords and ladies had flower spikes and the early purple orchid was starting to flower in the wood.

I find it so wonderful that after such a wet, cold winter and early spring, the bluebells still managed to come into flower during April. While we were working on Muddy Way I couldn't help but stop and admire them on numerous occasions. It goes to show that wildlife is incredibly resilient.

April 26th, the rest of the wood chip was put on the culvert at the start of Allotments Way which had become very muddy during the winter. We cleared the remaining wood chip from the car park and raised the path by about five inches, a useful increase but still probably not enough to keep the path dry in winter. There were two robins at the car park as we loaded up the transport and another two at the culvert as we raked out. It is such a joy to have them as colleagues-spectators-pitch invaders, especially when they show so little fear.

The early purple orchids were in bloom with several plants giving a fine display of their magenta flowers and the bluebells were just about at their best (see the coppicing report sent out in June). As I wandered the paths I found a cross between the blue and the much rarer white variety where the bell was white but the rim was blue, almost purple. The lords and ladies, or cuckoo pint (*Arum maculatum*) were just about to open with some already unfolding their skirts. I watched a squirrel sitting on a branch sharpening its teeth on a stick and I found a southern bracket (*Ganoderma australe*) on a dying ash tree. I almost thought it was a hoof fungus but the surface was much too red for that. As the blackthorn lost the last of its blossom which had been present from the middle of March the hawthorn started to open up to continue the display of white flowers.

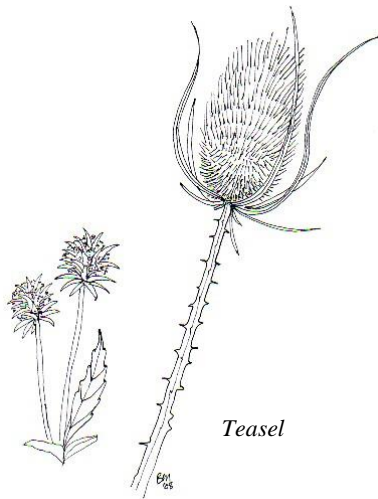


Lords and Ladies

We didn't work through May but I went for a walk on the 23rd. There were tad poles in both the Orchard Meadow ponds but I didn't see any on the Wetland. There were two female striped palmate newts in the small Orchard Meadow pond. In the wood I stirred up two roe deer close by the rookery and there was a holly blue butterfly near where we coppiced last winter. The flower meadow was beginning to bloom with buttercups, dog daisies and vetch but not much else and I am glad to say the hedge we laid has survived.

With one thing and another not much was accomplished in June but we did manage to repair two benches. I also tried to cut down three large trees in the coppice area ready for the sweet chestnut trees due to be planted in the autumn. I have to admit I made a mess of the job and had to have help from the estates team, so a big thanks to them for getting me out of a fix.

In early July it was discovered that there was a fallen branch hanging over the path along The Avenue. Because of its position and the size of the branch it was decided the path there should be closed until the danger could be cleared. It was a bit like the Sword of Damocles hanging over our heads. Most of the rest of the month Steve, Ray and I dedicated our time to bramble bashing along the paths and in the Flower Meadow. The brambles in the Flower Meadow were particularly bad due to previous year's neglect, and took a lot of effort due to the density and height of the growth, some of it was over two metres tall.



Walking round the Orchard Meadow in the second half of July it was very pleasing to see wild flowers I had introduced coming up in places I had not planted them; teasel, golden rod, purple loosestrife have all appeared where I didn't plant them, but the asters seem to have vanished after only a couple of years, which is a shame.

The blackberries were ripening by the 9th August and it seems to be a bumper crop. Even after all the bramble bashing I have done, there seems to be plenty left for the birds and dormice. I finished bramble bashing on the 16th Aug and we are concentrating on path clearance now. I did clear some of the reed mace (*Typha latifolia*) in the small pond on Orchard Meadow and found that some of what I thought was reed mace actually is branched bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*). This is another useful plant for wildlife, often used by nesting birds. The other plant that is growing readily in both Orchard Meadow ponds is soft rush (*Juncus effusus*).

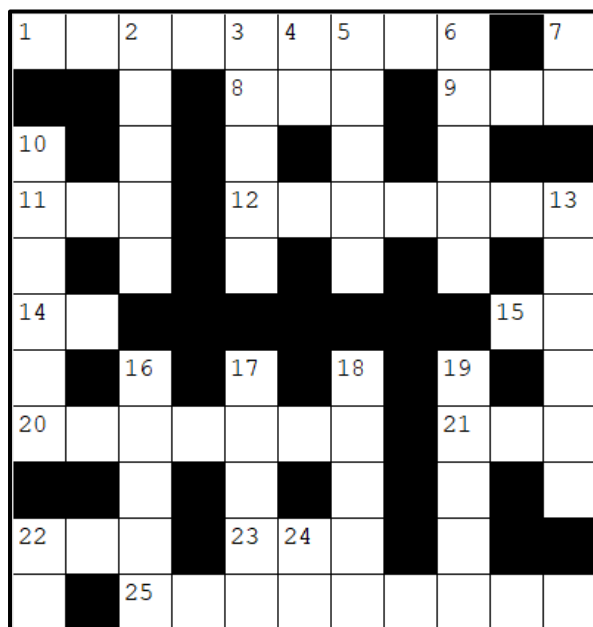
The coppice area for this season is by The Roundel and along The Avenue. We don't have any hedge laying to do so there will be some building of log piles and beetle pyramids.

FHW NEWS letter

Please note the dates of the workdays in your diary. They are:-

Date	Task
Sunday 24 th September	Coppicing and bramble bashing
Sunday 29 th October (clocks change)	Coppicing and bramble bashing
Sunday 26 th November	Coppicing and bramble bashing
Sunday 7 th January ** (one week late)	Coppicing and bramble bashing
Sunday 28 th January	Bramble bashing along the paths
Sunday 25 th February	Hedge trimming
Sunday 24 th March ** (one week early)	Hedge trimming

FHW Crossword No 173



Clue Across

1. *Cardamine pratensis*, (9).
8. Small busy insect, (3).
9. Fruit of rose, (3).
11. Conjunction, (3).
12. Decomposed material, (7).
14. Electronic data Processing, (1.1).
15. Graduate, (1.1).
20. Young tree, (7).
21. Female deer, (3).
22. Garland, (3).
23. Playing card, (3).
25. *Solidago, virgaurea* (9).

Clues Down

2. 11 across. 10 down. *Arum maculatum*, (5.3.6).
3. Month, (5).
4. Indefinite article, (2).
5. Things, (5).
6. New growth, (5).
7. Local doctor, (1.1).
10. See 2.
13. *Dipsacus fullonum*, (6).
16. Twig, (5).
17. Agave Fibre, (5).
18. Concur, (5).
19. Venomous reptile, (5).
22. Roman 60. (1.1).
24. Digital music format, (1.1).

Any News?

Items for the next Issue by 1st October please to:-

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