

# NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

THE Natural History Section has had twenty-two meetings during the last year. Of these eleven were outdoor meetings; eight were held in the County Museum; two were the annual ornithological and botany weekends at Missenden Abbey; one a most successful all day conference on Wild Life Conservation in Buckinghamshire, held in the Wendover Memorial Hall and organised by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalist Trust.

The first meeting of the year was on 2nd April. This was an indoor meeting held in Tring at the invitation of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society. The subject was the Flora of Drying Mud and the speaker Sir Edward Salisbury. This fascinating subject was followed up by an outing on 14th August to Startops End Reservoir to study this group of plants in its natural habitat. Again we were fortunate in having Sir Edward as leader. It was a wonderfully sunny day and many interesting plants were found including Round Fruited Rush (*Juncus compressus*); Flowering Rush (*Butomus umbellatus*); Common Mudwort (*Limosella aquatica*); and Jewel Weed (*Impatiens capensis*). Two Herons were seen, three Great Crested Grebe, a number of Coots and one Grey Lag Goose.

On 23rd April there was an outing to Chesham arranged by Mr. Peter Knipe who is preparing a new Flora of Buckinghamshire. The walk was along the riverside where several kinds of willows were examined. The moist ground provided a variety of plants including the fairly uncommon Lesser Celandine with bulbils (*Ranunculus ficaria*); Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*); Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*); Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*); Hartstongue (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*); and Common Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*). Later, on higher ground, members were able to see, some for the first time, a number of plants of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) growing in the hedges.

During the year two visits were made to Cockshoot Wood, on 1st May and on 11th September, to study trees and their reproduction. This is a very mixed wood and includes much Hornbeam and Wild Cherry as well as the more common species. A colony of Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) was found and some badger setts examined. It was interesting to revisit this wood in September, but disappointing to find how little fruit there was to be seen on the trees.

On 15th May a visit was made to the Pitstone area. Here an exciting find was made of two plants of the Pasque Flower (*Anemone pulsatilla*) in bloom in a location so far not recorded, though this rare chalk plant is seen in nearby areas.

The Natural History weekend at Missenden Abbey held in the early part of June was well attended and successful. This year an entirely new venture was included in the programme, an illustrated talk on spiders followed by a spider hunt in the Abbey grounds. This proved of great interest to the members.

One of the most popular features of these weekends is the discussion group led by the speakers, which takes place on Sunday morning and rounds off the whole course with a lively exchange of questions and answers.

On 26th June there was a walk from Latimer Green along the River Chess. Just after leaving the road a spring was noted at the river's edge, bubbling straight out of the chalk into the river. This spring was of interest as it first appeared only two years ago. Covert Island, the Nature Reserve, was visited but it was too overgrown with nettles to penetrate far. Some of the land beside the river had recently been ploughed—possibly for the first time; at one point there was a well defined patch where many Tudor tiles had been turned up by the plough, no doubt the site of one or more Tudor cottages. The return journey was made through the fields by a grassy footpath which was once a road from Chesham to Rickmansworth.

On 7th August at Bledlow Cop a new start was made on snail and plant long term ecological observations. Miss Jill Royston, the leader of this project, reports "We read much in scientific journals of the need for that knowledge of natural processes which can only come from a long term series of observations, and the natural history section is very fortunate in having records of the vegetation of Bledlow Cop since 1937. The observations were continued this year with the introduction of a more methodical means of recording the distribution of plants, which will enable different members to repeat the work in future years. Unfortunately it was a cold wet windy day and, although the few members worked hard, we did not cover the whole area. However, twenty-eight species were noted which had not been recorded previously and twenty species previously present were not recorded in 1966. This, and the interesting distribution of some species in 1966, will only be explained when the whole area has been surveyed completely—we hope in 1967. The meeting was a joint one with the Conchological Society, and thirty-four species of mollusca were recorded for the area."

During the winter there were a number of meetings held at the County Museum. These included lectures on Flowers of the Seashore; Trees and Shrubs of the Chilterns; Animals of the Seashore, their habits and life histories; Mosses, Liverworts and Lichens and, the last meeting of the year, an elementary talk on the Planets. A members' afternoon was held in December at which members were invited to show slides. The photographs shown were of a high standard.

In January Mr. Woodward presented a most interesting cine film of plants and animals, which he and Mr. Shuttleworth had made throughout the seasons of the year. All the subjects were filmed locally and were shown with a tape-recorded commentary.

As before, members have recorded many plants seen during the course of the year. The following is a list of the more interesting plants seen in 1966. These have been collated by Mr. Geoffrey Glover.

|                          |                                      |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Pasque Flower            | <i>Anemone pulsatilla</i>            | Pitstone                                  |
| Small-flowered Buttercup | <i>Ranunculus parviflorus</i>        | Sedrup                                    |
| Wall Mustard             | <i>Diplotaxis muralis</i>            | Stone                                     |
| Hoary Cress              | <i>Cardaria draba</i>                | Stone                                     |
| Wart Cress               | <i>Coronopus didymus</i>             | Aylesbury                                 |
| Soapwort                 | <i>Saponaria officinalis</i>         | Longdown                                  |
| Corn Spurrey             | <i>Spergula arvensis</i>             | Hampden                                   |
| Meadow Cranesbill        | <i>Geranium pratense</i>             | Little Hampden; Gt. Missenden;<br>Bledlow |
| Mountain Cranesbill      | <i>Geranium pyrenaicum</i>           | Little Hampden; Stone;<br>Wendover        |
| Sleeping Beauty          | <i>Oxalis corniculata</i>            | Hartwell                                  |
| Jewel Weed               | <i>Impatiens capensis</i>            | Old Linslade                              |
| Dragon Teeth             | <i>Tetragonolobus<br/>maritimus</i>  | Near Wotton; Fingest                      |
| Grass Vetchling          | <i>Lathyrus nissolia</i>             | Wotton Underwood; Dancer's<br>End         |
| Lady's Mantle            | <i>Alchemilla vulgaris</i>           | Gt. Hampden; Dancer's End;<br>Longdown    |
| Orpine                   | <i>Sedum telephium</i>               | Gt. Hampden; Pitstone; Gt.<br>Missenden   |
| Spurge Laurel            | <i>Daphne laureola</i>               | Stone; Bradenham; Aston<br>Rowant         |
| Water Dock               | <i>Rumex hydrolapathum</i>           | Hartwell                                  |
| Green Alkanet            | <i>Pentaglottis<br/>sempervirens</i> | Stone                                     |
| Thorn Apple              | <i>Datura stramonium</i>             | Stone                                     |
| Fluellen                 | <i>Kickxia spuria</i>                | Sedrup                                    |
| Fluellen                 | <i>Kickxia elatine</i>               | Sedrup                                    |
| Henbit                   | <i>Lamium amplexicaule</i>           | Stone                                     |
| Clary                    | <i>Salvia horminoides</i>            | Stone                                     |
| Skullcap                 | <i>Scutellaria galericulata</i>      | Littleworth                               |
| Great Bellflower         | <i>Campanula latifolia</i>           | Little Hampden                            |
| Danewort                 | <i>Sambucus ebulus</i>               | Aston Rowant; Dinton                      |
| Chicory                  | <i>Cichorium intybus</i>             | Stoney Green; Marlow;<br>Wooburn Green    |
| Cudweed                  | <i>Filago germanica</i>              | Bishopstone; Wotton                       |
| Three lobed Bur-Marigold | <i>Bidens tripartita</i>             | Haydon Mill                               |
| Butterbur                | <i>Petasites hybridus</i>            | Bledlow; Wooburn                          |
| Blue Fleabane            | <i>Erigeron acer</i>                 | Longdown; Wendover; Stone                 |
| Canadian Fleabane        | <i>Erigeron canadensis</i>           | Aston Rowant; Bledlow; Stone              |
| Marsh Cudweed            | <i>Gnaphalium<br/>uliginosum</i>     | Stoney Green; Stone                       |
| Musk Thistle             | <i>Carduus nutans</i>                | Chinor; Crowell                           |
| Bristly Ox-Tongue        | <i>Picris echioides</i>              | Bishopstone; Hampden                      |
| Few-flowered Leek        | <i>Allium paradoxum</i>              | Stone                                     |

|                    |                               |                                     |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Marsh Helleborine  | <i>Epipactis palustris</i>    | Bullington bog                      |
| Violet Helleborine | <i>Epipactis sessilifolia</i> | Green Hailey; The Lee;<br>Ashbridge |

At the Ashbridge site a very interesting variety was seen without green chlorophyll, the resulting colour being a beautiful rose-violet.

|             |                            |             |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Musk Orchid | <i>Herminium monorchis</i> | Near Kimble |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|

Unfortunately cattle have been grazed on this site and scarcely any remain out of the 250 plants seen in 1965.

|                 |                            |  |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--|
| Fragrant Orchid | <i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i> | Kimble Rifle Range continues to have a great display of this orchid with some white ones present |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--|

|              |                           |                            |
|--------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Ghost Orchid | <i>Epipogium aphyllum</i> | Somewhere in the Chilterns |
|--------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|

This exceedingly rare orchid was seen this year in strength in August and September. One plant sported no less than four flowers. It would seem that at least twelve plants were seen at various times, and it is gratifying to report that a number of botanists and flower lovers were able to see this unusual orchid in its natural habitat a truly vintage year induced no doubt by the high level of moisture in the soil in late summer.

|               |                     |  |
|---------------|---------------------|--|
| Monkey Orchid | <i>Orchis simia</i> |  |
|---------------|---------------------|--|

Several members were able to see this rare orchid in its Oxfordshire site, where it survives precariously in small numbers.

The other orchids mentioned in the 1964 report were all seen again in the sites mentioned.

There have also been some reports of butterflies seen on outings. The following is a short account of some seen near Wotton.

|                     |                              |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Speckled Wood       | <i>Pararge aegeria</i>       |
| Gatekeeper          | <i>Maniola tithonus</i>      |
| Meadow Brown        | <i>Maniola jurtina</i>       |
| Ringlet             | <i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i> |
| Small Skipper       | <i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i> |
| Marbled White       | <i>Melanargia galathea</i>   |
| Painted Lady        | <i>Vanessa cardui</i>        |
| Red Admiral         | <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>      |
| Brimstone           | <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>     |
| Pale Clouded Yellow | <i>Colias hyale</i>          |
| Peacock             | <i>Nymphalis io</i>          |
| Large Tortoiseshell | <i>Nymphalis polychloros</i> |
| Small Tortoiseshell | <i>Aglais urticae</i>        |
| Comma               | <i>Polygonia c-album</i>     |
| Small Copper        | <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>       |
| Common Blue         | <i>Polyommatus icarus</i>    |

## ERRATA

There were two errors in the list of contents in *Records*, Vol. XVII part 5 (1965). In line 4 for Bolton read Bolter; in line 5 for Miscenden read Missenden.

In *Records* Vol. XVII part 4 (1964) page 316, Parish Registers, for North Crawley read Astwood.

In *Records* Vol. XVI, part 2 (1955-6) page 114, it was stated that Harleyford House, Marlow had been demolished. Fortunately the house still survives although its future remains uncertain.

## BACK NUMBERS

Although stocks of some back numbers of the *Records* are still held by the Society and are available for purchase, others have long been out of print. As there is a continuing demand for back numbers from both institutions and individuals, the Hon. Secretary would be glad to hear of any that are available for return or resale to the Society.

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