



# ELMBRIDGE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*(formerly Weybridge Natural History and Aquarist Society)*

**BULLETIN**  
ISSN 0268-389X

No. 290, August 2011

## **AUTUMN 2011 – SPRING 2012 PROGRAMME**

*Wed 14 Sep* "Invasion of the Aliens: Climate Change and Invasive Species in Britain". Talk by Geoffrey Kibby, writer, mycologist and arachnologist.

*Wed 12 Oct* Members' Evening.

*Wed 9 Nov* "Discovering Kew's Hidden Treasures". Talk by Dr Helen Hartley, Project Digitisation Manager (Library, Art & Archives), Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

*Wed 14 Dec* "Structure and Symmetry in Plants". Talk by Professor Maurice Moss, Surrey University.

*Wed 11 Jan* Members' Evening.

*Wed 8 Feb* "Ladybirds". Talk by Andrew Halstead, Principal Entomologist, RHS, Wisley.

*Wed 14 Mar* Talk to be arranged.

*Wed 11 Apr* AGM

Indoor meetings are held from September to April, at the Methodist Church Hall, Mayfield Road, Weybridge, at 8.00pm. Non-members are welcome to all meetings (£3.00 charge, refundable if you join the Society).

Refreshments charge (winter meetings): 50p. Details of the March 2012 talk will be published in the next issue of the *Bulletin*.

## ENHS MEETING NOTES

### Hidden Hatchford, 8 May 2011

This spring visit to Hatchford was primarily a tree walk, but there was more to enjoy along the way. Leaving from Pond car park, we crossed the edge of Ockham Common, where a large plantation of conifers has recently been removed. Only a few old Scots pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) have been left standing.

After viewing a large sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) in a wood edge, we followed the wide track down to Hatchford End, passing some fine hornbeams (*Carpinus betulus*) and a once hidden, now exposed pond. Richard Jewell pointed out some trackside stems of betony (*Stachys officinalis*), and some broad-leaved helleborines (*Epipactis helleborine*).

From Surrey Cottage we took a narrow, winding path through the overgrown chestnut coppice of Hatchford Wood. This wood is part of the land given to Surrey County Council in compensation for the area lost to the M25, and was taken from the old Hatchford Park estate. Some remarkable features were gained in this transaction, however sad the losses. One, now entered, is the hilltop grove of coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), an unusual landmark feature, easily seen from the M25. There are over 20 trees, some over 100ft tall, and 15 feet in girth. They are remnants of an arboretum begun in 1845 by Lord Ellesmere, and probably planted not long after that date.

On the edge of this grove is another oddity, the plundered mausoleum of Bernhard Samuelson, father of an Edwardian owner of Hatchford Park. It is an impressive yellow sandstone temple, but its one-ton sculpted metal tomb was (somehow) stolen in 1961! The mausoleum now looks sinister in its shady corner of the wood, ringed by yew trees (*Taxus baccata*).

The bank which marks the southern boundary of Hatchford Wood is lined with grand old oaks (*Quercus robur*), and others are visible in the parkland beyond.

At the eastern end, we paused to view a Lucombe oak (*Quercus x hispanica*), the cross between turkey oak and cork oak. On an old common lime (*Tilia x europaea*) was a spectacular tier of 'dryad's saddle' fungus (*Polyporus squamosus*). On it was a distinctive red and black beetle, *Diaperis boleti*, only recently discovered in Surrey. Scotty Dodd, Surrey Wildlife Trust entomologist, says that he recorded it in almost the same spot last year.

The walk ended at Chatley Semaphore Tower, which was open at the time, but it seemed that nobody had the time or energy to make the climb. But it is very worthwhile if you have!

DICK ALDER

## Silver-studded blue butterflies on Fairmile Common, 19 June 2011

This walk was led by David Page, Countryside Estates Officer for Elmbridge Borough Council, who began by telling us that the silver-studded blues (*Plebeius argus*) had emerged very early this year, and had already been around for three weeks. He estimated that the numbers had been in thousands, if not tens of thousands, on this site. Fortunately there were still plenty around for us to see today.

Dave gave us a quick idea of the butterfly's life cycle, before we began our tour of inspection. The adult female lays her eggs on ground plants near to the anthills of *Lasius* species ants - NOT *Myrmica* ('red ants'), and definitely not *Formica* (wood ants). The ants grab the tiny larvae as they emerge, and transport them below into their nests. Herein lies a question: do these larvae feed on roots, or are they brought up at night to feed on leaves? Or both? The ants clean honeydew from the bodies of the caterpillars, as it seems that it can clog their breathing apparatus. Lepidopterists have found it difficult to raise silver-studded blues away from the ants. The larvae are parasitised by two insects, an ichneumon wasp and a braconid fly, which sneak into the ants' nests under cover of a pheromone; but they don't seem to cause serious decline in the butterfly's numbers.

The caterpillars pupate the following May, then hatch within the ants' nest and make their way to the surface with wings still unfolded, the droplets from their bodies being cleaned up by the ants. Dave has found that their emergence coincides with the first flowering of bell heather (*Erica cineria*), especially when about 15% is in bloom. This gives the adult butterfly a source of nectar for flight. Males congregate to await the emergence of females, who sometimes don't get a chance to fly before they are pounced upon.

Our walk began at the west end of the common, near the border with the Fairmile Hotel. Despite overcast conditions and a light wind, we soon saw silver-studded blues taking to the air and at rest. It seems that the Fairmile specimens are larger than those at other sites, especially the females. Dave pointed out that in wet weather they tend to shelter on gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) pods, which provide very good camouflage. We then crossed to the eastern section, known as the 'Flying Circle', the tarmac area previously used for flying model aircraft. The tarmac has now gone, at a cost of £6000, and bare yellow sand is exposed. This will be seeded with heather to speed up regeneration. Regular checks will be necessary to control scrub but it is hoped that this area will soon be a haven for the butterflies, which at present are confined to the edges. There is a huge rabbit warren below, and the rabbits have an important role in the management, provided their numbers are kept in check. At present, this heather fringe looks exceedingly good, and is alive with silver-studded blues. Dave has noticed that these weak-flying butterflies are blown to the east end by the wind!

A surprise treat today for the botanists was a group of pyramidal orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) in the grass edge. And for the entomologists, a big, fat large birch sawfly (*Cimbex femoratus*) larva, and a bryony ladybird (*Henosepilachna argus*).

Thanks are due to Dave for arranging a good show, despite the unpromising weather.

DICK ALDER

Dragonfly Walk on Esher Common, 10 July 2011

This walk was led by Don Tagg for the Dragonfly Society, with ENHS as guests. We began at Black Pond, which has been cleared out since the last joint visit in 2009. It was feared that the brilliant emerald (*Somatochlora metallica*) would have been lost in the process, but one showed up immediately to entertain us, as before. Black-tailed skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*) also showed. Marsh St John's-wort (*Hypericum elodes*) was also seen to be recovering on the west bank of the pond, but the two wartime water tanks on the common proved unproductive this time. On the way to them, a colony of the mining-bee *Halictus rubicundus* was found in the path, attended by a 'bee-wolf', *Philanthus triangulum*.

A lunch break was taken at A3 pond, where we watched brown hawker (*Aeshna grandis*), large red damselfly (*Phyrrosoma nymphula*), and blue-tailed damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*). Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) and large skipper (*Ochlodes venata*) butterflies were flying, and we realised we were sitting upon a colony of the mining-bee *Andrea flavipes*!

Then came a long march to Middle Pond, for a downy emerald (*Cordulia aenea*), two brown hawkers and a red-eyed damselfly (*Erythromma najas*). Back over the A3, one large red damselfly was noted by the ditch, then we skirted the east side of Black Pond, with a reed warbler singing. A clouded border moth (*Lomaspilis marginata*) was briefly detained.

Finally we investigated the newly created wetland below the dam. It proved interesting, with an emperor dragonfly (*Anax imperator*) egg-laying, common darters (*Sympetrum striolatum*) patrolling, many common blue damselflies (*Enallagma cyathigerum*), and a black darter (*Sympetrum danae*) proving very photogenic.

DICK ALDER

### **Dragonflies and Other Natural History, Thursley Common, 17 July 2011**

Don Tagg led this walk, which was attended by five ENHS members and Mike Thurner. The weather threatened to rule out this event, and in fact came close to doing so. It began and ended with prolonged torrential downpours, which cut our walk very short. However we did manage to go out to Pine Island and back via the boardwalks, and recorded a list of three dragonflies! These were small red damselfly (*Ceriagrion tenellum*), common blue damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) and common darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*).

Don and Chris spotted a mature adder (*Vipera berus*). We heard no curlews (*Numenius arquata*) this time, but did hear and see a stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*). As a midday storm broke, we were able to retreat to a large tent set up by Moat Pond, by Natural England and Surrey Wildlife Trust. This was for a public consultation exercise on proposals to graze or otherwise maintain the common. They chose an unfortunate day for it, but we were grateful for a dry venue for lunch, and some interesting discussion.

## Moth Night, 16 Rectory Close, Byfleet, 19 August 2011

This was a new venue for an ENHS moth night, but I have been recording moths here for many years. Conditions were almost ideal. Two traps were used: the society's mercury vapour and my actinic. These were switched on at 9pm, and the session ended at midnight. There were no surprises, but a reasonable list of regular visitors, listed below with number of individuals caught in parentheses if more than one.

Brimstone (*Opisthograptis luteola*)  
Chequered fruit-tree tortrix (*Pandemis corylana*)  
Clay (*Mythimna ferrago*)  
Codling (*Cydia pomonella*)  
Common carpet (*Epirrhoe alternata*)  
Copper underwing (*Amphipyra pyramidea*) (2)  
Double-striped pug (*Gymnoscelis rufifasciata*)  
Flame shoulder (*Ochreopleura plecta*)  
Garden carpet (*Xanthorhoe fluctata*)  
Large yellow underwing (*Noctua pronuba*) (2)  
Lesser broad-bordered yellow underwing (*Noctua janthe*) (8+)  
Marbled beauty (*Cryphia domestica*)  
Mother-of-pearl (*Pleuroptya ruralis*) (2)  
Old lady (*Mormo maura*)  
Riband wave (*Idaea aversata*)  
'Rustic' (*Hoplodrina* sp.) (3)  
Setaceous Hebrew character (*Xestia c-nigrum*)  
Sharp-angled carpet (*Euphyia unangulata*)  
Shuttle-shaped dart (*Agrotis puta*) (4+)  
Small blood-vein (*Scopula imitaria*)  
Small dusty wave (*Idaea seriata*)  
Turnip (*Agrotis segetum*)  
Willow beauty (*Peribatodes rhomboidaria*) (4)  
Yellow shell (*Campptogramma bilineata*) (4+)  
An oak leaf roller (micro-moth) (*Phycita roborella*) (2)

This list will go to Graham Collins, Surrey Moth Recorder, but the venue is outside Elmbridge District. It is hoped that next year we will find new sites to record within Elmbridge. Suggestions are welcome!

DICK ALDER