



# ELMBRIDGE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*(formerly Weybridge Natural History and Aquarist Society)*

**BULLETIN**

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## **AUTUMN/EARLY WINTER 2013 PROGRAMME**

- Wed 11 Sep Evening riverside stroll and bat watch, followed by a meal at 'The Anchor' at Pyrford Lock, Lock Lane, Pyrford (grid ref. TQ053593). Park at the pub (with permission; ignore notices), and meet at the bridge at 7pm; otherwise, join us for the meal at 8.30pm latest. **Please try to let Dick Alder know by 8 September** that you are coming, so that a suitable table can be booked at the pub (01932 400966).
- Wed 9 Oct 'Invasive species.' A talk by Frances Halstead of Surrey Wildlife Trust's Surrey Greenspace Project.
- Weds 13 Nov 'Wildlife Aid.' A talk by Dr Mike Berwick on the work of this valuable local organisation, based in Leatherhead.
- Sun 17 Nov Fungus foray at Oxshott Heath. Joint meeting with the West Weald Fungus Recording Group. Meet at 10.30am in Sandy Lane car park (grid ref. TQ139617) .
- Wed 11 Dec 'The Esher Common: historical aspects'. A talk by Dave Page, Elmbridge Borough Council's Countryside Officer, and ENHS member. Followed by mince pies and sale of natural history related items (please bring any items you want to contribute).

### *Moth Trapping*

Moth trapping may take place on occasional Friday nights if good warm weather is forecast. Members will be contacted with details via email a day beforehand.

Indoor meetings are held from October to April, at the Methodist Church Hall, Mayfield Road, Weybridge, at **8.15pm (note new start time)**. Non-members are welcome to all meetings (£3.00 charge, refundable if you join the Society). Refreshments charge (winter meetings): 50p.

## **CORRECTION**

The Spring 2013 issue of the Bulletin was erroneously numbered 295 instead of 296. Members on email have been sent a corrected copy; please would others correct their copy.

## ENHS MEETING NOTES

### Winkworth Arboretum, 13 March 2013

Peter Herring treated us to an illustrated talk on this well known National Trust holding near Godalming. It was the creation of tree-lover Dr Wilfred Fox, born 1875, the son of a tea importer, who became a famous dermatologist. He bought Winkworth Farm near Hascombe in 1918, later to give its name to the arboretum. Meanwhile, in 1928, he set up the Roads Beautifying Association, instating all the big-name horticulturalists on its board; Fox was its guiding light, and it was responsible for tree-planting along roadsides, especially the new by-passes that were starting to appear in the 1930s, including Kingston and Guildford.

In 1937 he found a stretch of woodland for sale near Hascombe, along the route he took to Godalming Station to commute to London. This belonged to the popular actress Beatrice Lillie (Lady Peel) and Fox bought a hundred acres. From early on he began planting trees to enhance the landscape, starting in 'The Bowl', then in a plantation of larch etc. which had been commandeered in the war leaving a 'tabula rasa' with a few residual pines. He planted for autumn colour: maples, tupelo, cherries, enhanced by the lake at the bottom with its Edwardian boathouse.

Another early project was Sorbus Hill: rowans, service trees, etc. were a particular interest of his. Fox's family was dragooned into clearance and planting, as were his friends. There was only one formal gardener. He learned from experience that he had to plant trees by the dozen to get the colour effect he desired in the landscape setting.

Another of Fox's projects was the Winter Garden. This features strongly scented mahonias for winter flowering, frost-resisting witch-hazels, and Christmas and other camellias - some now 30-40 feet tall. In late winter masses of snowdrops carpet this area; later on, the native bluebells which colonised the arboretum after Fox's initial clearances are to be found everywhere. The wild flowers are surveyed regularly, as are the fungi; waxcaps grow in the meadow.

In 1952 Fox gave 55 acres to the National Trust when his plantings were still quite young. He died in 1962 and the Trust got 35 acres more; they took total control of the arboretum in the early 1990s. For many years Fox's secretary, Margaret, helped him, and them, with its management. It is now one of the Trust's most popular attractions, especially in April for the Azalea Steps, planted with colourful Japanese species, and October for the autumn foliage. Over 100,000 people visit every year, and it is open on 364 days. The National Trust has invested large amounts of money in Winkworth and continues to do so in order to deal with ongoing problems. For example, the lake had to be completely drained recently as it was crawling with invasive American signal crayfish), a walkway was needed (this was built from recycled plastic), a million pounds is to be spent on drains, and honey fungus is a serious problem, with trees lost every year. But given the Arboretum's beautiful scenery and host of specimen trees - some are national champions - it is considered worth the trouble.

On the first Wednesday of each month Peter Herring leads a guided walk, no doubt with the greatest erudition, and there is an excellent tea room.

RICHARD JEWELL

## SPRING AND SUMMER STUDY WALKS

Dave Page organised a series of eight study walks from May to July this year, for which he is due a vote of thanks. As last year, they have proved useful and instructive. The late spring and summer weather could have wrecked the plans for these walks, but in fact we usually found something new and unexpected. This year, three weekend walks were included by popular demand. Average attendance has been around six members.

### Wednesday 8 May, The Ledges

This was a chance to visit the newly rebuilt boardwalk beside the River Mole, on a circuit from West End Lane car park. Our visit coincided with a fine show of bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and kingcup (*Caltha palustris*), with some wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), goldilocks (*Ranunculus auricomus*), lady's-smock (*Cardamine pratensis*), opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*), dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), common dog violet (*Viola riviniana*) and yellow pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*). Also a few primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), a lone cowslip (*Primula veris*) and pre-flowering stems of large bittercress (*Cardamine amara*), barren strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*), redcurrant (*Ribes rubrum*) and moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*).

On a sycamore stump, we found two fresh caps of the uncommon bracket fungus *Polyporus ciliatus*.

### Saturday 1 June, Desborough Island

This large area, much of it flower-rich grassland, was isolated by a new cut on the River Thames made between 1930 and 1935. Part of the island is managed by Elmbridge Borough Council, with the grass cut annually for hay by a contractor.

A feature of the meadows is its meadow crane's-bill (*Geranium pratense*), which would have been a sea of blue in a normal year, but was only showing a few flowers on the day. Nor were there any flowers on lady's bedstraw (*Galium verum*) and black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*). Hedgerow crane's-bill (*Geranium pyrenaicum*) and cut-leaved cranesbill (*Geranium dissectum*) were blooming, and we were pleased to find a large, unexpected area of grass vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), and some hoary plantain (*Plantago media*). There was heavy, heady and very late blossom on the hedgerow hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) trees.

Quite a few insects were seen, including orange-tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*) and holly blue (*Celastrina argiolus*) butterflies, burnet companion (*Euclidia glyphica*), cinnabar (*Tyria jacobaeae*), common carpet (*Epirrhoe alternata*) and nettle-tap (*Anthophila fabriciana*) moths.

It was a good day for the birdwatchers, with skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) rising, swifts (*Apus apus*) overhead, common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) and mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*) on the river.

### Thursday 13 June, Hurst Meadows

This was an event involving Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) and the Friends of Hurst Park, which was also attended by a few members of ENHS. It was a full-day affair; the morning was devoted to the flora, quite as spectacular a list as on our visit last year, but sadly very little of it in flower at the time. Some flowers were showing on dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*), common bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), lesser yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), hoary cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*), ragged-robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) and oxeye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*); but none on great burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*), meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), lady's bedstraw (*Galium verum*) or salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*).

The afternoon session was concerned with the invertebrates of the site, with SWT leading a sweep-netting exercise. A full list of finds was made by Catherine Burton of Surrey Biological Information Centre; not all could be identified on site. Some of the regular lepidoptera were noted such as common blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) butterflies, and burnet companion (*Euclidia glyphica*), yellow shell (*Camptogramma bilineata*) and longhorn (*Adela reaumurella*) moths. Bird-cherry trees (*Prunus padus*) were festooned with the webs of what might have been the larvae of bird-cherry ermine moth (*Yponomeuta evonymella*).

### Wednesday 26 June, Fairmile Common

This walk was planned to coincide with the emergence of the silver-studded blue (*Plebejus argus*) butterflies that are a special feature of the site. Luckily, the first ones had emerged just a few days before; now, despite a shortage of bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) flowers, there were quite a few on the wing. Some were seen also on the north side of the A3, for the first time. In that section, we flushed out many little, fluttering moths from the wood sage bordering a path; these proved to be the wood sage plume moth (*Capperia britanniodactyla*), an uncommon species for which this has become a major new site. Other moths took to the wing, including true lover's knot (*Lycophotia porphyrea*), beautiful yellow underwing (*Anarta myrtilli*), common heath (*Ematurga atomaria*), common white wave (*Cabera pusaria*), brown silver-line (*Petrophora chlorosata*), yellow shell (*Camptogramma bilineata*) and cinnabar (*Tyria jacobaeae*). We saw our first meadow brown (*Maniola jurtina*) butterfly of the year, and a small heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*).

Heath bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) was in plentiful flower, as was sand spurrey (*Spergularia rubra*) in places, with dodder (*Cuscuta epithimum*) on the heather and bugloss (*Anchusa arvensis*) on the lane edge. On the slopes above the little pond were common spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), greater bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*), marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*) and ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*).

### Saturday 29 June, Brooklands Community Park

An anticlockwise circuit of the park began at the small pond beside the nursery school. As in other years, the hybrid orchid (*Dactylorhiza x grandis*) was in flower on the edge, but reduced this year to only 20 stunted plants. Into the woodland, we followed the new path that has been cut through the trees; it has been gravel-surfaced either side of a brand-new boardwalk which crosses an area liable to flooding. At

the far end of the boardwalk, Dick Alder pointed out a wild service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) that he discovered two years ago, and Richard Jewell noticed a spectacular bank of the uncommon fern common polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*). Where the path skirted the River Wey, Dave spotted a kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*).

Out in the open area of the park, we visited a large patch of tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) on which larvae of another rare plume moth, the tansy plume (*Gilmeria ochrodactyla*), had been found the previous week. Beyond, towards the overflow channel from the Wey, three small heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*) butterflies were seen.

Across the old runway, a few hoary cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*) were found in the edge of the grassland. On the earth bank on the west side of the park, the sheep's bit (*Jasione montana*) and common centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*) were coming into flower. Below, amongst the tall grasses, the meadow flowers were not yet in bloom, apart from plenty of lesser yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and a few grass vetchling (*Lathyrus nessolia*). Some common blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) and meadow brown (*Maniola jurtina*) butterflies were about, with silver Y (*Autographa gamma*), cinnabar (*Tyria jacobaeae*), yellow shell (*Camptogramma bilineata*), burnet companion (*Euclidia glyphica*), straw dot (*Rivula sericealis*), and brown plume (*Stenoptilia pterodactyla*) moths.

#### **Saturday 6 July, Esher Common, Black Pond**

A circuit of Black Pond, clockwise this time, started under the electricity lines on the east side, where we saw a marsh/edible (*Rana* sp.) frog jump into a murky little ditch, whence it eyed us suspiciously. Many little common frogs (*Rana temporaria*) hopped around the pond edge, in danger of being crushed underfoot; and smooth newts (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) were swimming by the dam.

This was a day for watching insects, especially dragonflies. These were about in good numbers, but most were what we took to be either azure (*Coenagrion puella*) or common blue (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) damselfly; one was photographed by Alan Forno with its head in the jaws of a hunting spider. Also noted were a mating pair of large red damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*), a black-tailed skimmer (*Orithetrum cancellatum*), several broad-bodied chaser (*Libellula depressa*), and one brilliant emerald (*Somatochlora metallica*). Several large skipper (*Ochlodes venata*) butterflies, two ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperanthus*) and a speckled wood (*Pararge aegeria*) were on the wing. Four marbled white spot (*Protodeltote pygarga*) moths were flushed from vegetation, as were two wood sage plume (*Capperia britanniodactyla*) moths (as seen at Fairmile Common), from two separate patches of the food plant.

Some good new finds of plants were made, including a patch of round-leaved sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) on the west bank of Black Pond; plus slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*), trifold bur-marigold (*Bidens tripartita*) and lesser skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*).

A reed warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) sang constantly from the east bank; coot (*Fulica atra*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and mute swans (*Cygnus olor*) were on the water.

Dave expressed disappointment with the behaviour of dog owners, who encourage their animals to jump into the pond, thus seriously eroding the banks either side of the dam, as well as upsetting the wildlife.

### Wednesday 10 July, West End Common

This was a chance to check out four of the ponds on the common, as drought set in. En route from West End Lane car park, a few butterflies were recorded: small tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), many meadow brown (*Maniola jurtina*), comma (*Polygonia c-album*), speckled wood (*Pararge aegeria*), ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) and one purple hairstreak (*Quercusia quercus*), plus red admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) on the return leg.

Chequers Pond still held a reasonable amount of water and some garden-type white water lilies in flower.

Halfpenny Pond was half-dry, with hundreds of little common toads (*Bufo bufo*) and common frogs (*Rana temporaria*) in and around it. A marsh/edible (*Rana* sp.) frog, a great pond snail (*Lymnaea stagnalis*) and numerous small fish were in residence. Carpets of water crowfoot (*Ranunculus* sp.) were in flower, as were creeping spearwort (*Ranunculus reptans*), floating sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*) and a little of the rare tubular water dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*). An edging of tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*), great reedmace (*Typha latifolia*), water mint (*Mentha aquatica*), water-purslane (*Lythrum portula*), common marsh bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), common spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and yellow flag (*Iris pseudacorus*) added to the fine picture, with azure (*Coenagrion puella*) or common blue (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) damselflies (species uncertain) filling the air.

Margy Pond was also quite rich in species, with more water crowfoot (*Ranunculus* sp.) and creeping spearwort (*Ranunculus reptans*) but also some marsh St. John's wort (*Hypericum elodes*). Yet more damselflies, and dozens of brown china-mark (*Elophila nymphaeata*) moths were disturbed from the pond edge, plus one common carpet moth (*Epirrhoe alternata*). Whirligig beetles (Gyrinidae family) gyrated on the water surface.

Lardy Pond had a bed of *Sphagnum* sp. moss at one end with some water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) and floating sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*); a little purple-loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) was found at the other end. The water was murky and brown, but apparently not just from being stirred up by dogs.

### Wednesday 24 July, Oxshott Heath

Dave was called away on family duties, so we didn't have the benefit of his explanation of the current situation on Oxshott Heath. However, we had a pleasant stroll from the station to the sandpit and back, on a hot, dry morning.

Our knowledge of solitary bees and wasps wasn't sufficient to identify any of the insects we saw, but photographs were taken of an interesting sandy knoll near the steps to the memorial; here, a colony of mining bees was being harassed by what looked to be two species of ruby-tailed wasp (Chrysididae family). The plateau area was alive with gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*) butterflies. As we watched, a lone white butterfly approach us over the sandpit, we eventually realised that it was a marbled



*Watching solitary bees and their parasites on Oxshott Heath. (Photograph: Dick Alder.)*

white (*Melanargia galathea*), not one of the regular ‘cabbage whites’.

Down below the monument, north of the railway line, the grass and heather was being patrolled by six-spot burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*) moths with meadow brown (*Maniola jurtina*), plus one ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) and one small white (*Pieris rapae*) butterflies. Also, three silver Y (*Autographa gamma*) moths were disturbed.

DICK ALDER

## ENHS MEMBERSHIP

Membership subscriptions for 2013-14: minimum £10.00 single, £15.00 family/couples. (Additional donations would be most welcome, in order to help offset recent unavoidable increases in expenditure.) If you have not already done so, please complete the enclosed renewal form **as soon as possible** and send it with a cheque (payable to Elmbridge Natural History Society) to:

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## BULLETIN CONTRIBUTIONS/EMAIL COPIES

Many thanks for the contributions to this issue of the *Bulletin*. Contributions for the **Autumn 2013** issue are welcome, and should be sent **by 8 October** (preferably via e-mail, although hand- or typewritten articles are perfectly acceptable), to:

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**Note to contributors:** if including tabulated text, please try to supply this as a Word or Excel table, not formatted using tab spacings or columns. Please spell species' common names with an initial lower case letter, and include the scientific name (genus and species, italicised) in brackets after the first mention.

If you wish to receive your *Bulletin* by e-mail, please send an e-mail to Lynn (see above).

## WEBSITE

The Society has a website which includes general information on the Society and its activities, as well as background and membership details, news on recent activities and upcoming events, plus archives of the latest *Bulletin* issues, and appropriate local links. The Internet address is: [www.enhs.co.uk](http://www.enhs.co.uk).