



SPELTHORNE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



www.snhs.org.uk

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Newsletter: Liz and Roger Whitaker, The Hollies, Middle Hill, Egham, Surrey, TW20 OJG
Autumn 2022

Dear Member

Welcome to the Autumn newsletter.

Some very sad news

Jose Green, a longstanding member and supporter of the Society has passed away after a long illness. She will be fondly remembered for the excellent weekends away that she arranged for us. Jose also played an important role in organising the, now disbanded, Thames Valley Horticultural Society.

Beryl Shattock, a member of the Society for many years before her health deteriorated has passed away. Beryl represented the Society on Civic Pride's Laleham Pond Nature Reserve project. She later became warden of the Reserve.

Future events

Wednesday 12th October at 8.15pm Thea Cox, Conservation Biologist, Marine and Freshwater from Zoological Society of London will talk about The Marine Mammals in the River Thames

Wednesday 9th November at 8.15pm Dr Erica McAlister from The Natural History makes a welcome return to talk to us about metamorphosis, also the title of her recent talks on radio 4.

Wednesday Morning 16th November 10am to 12 noon Charlie Burgess, the reserve warden of Kempton Nature Reserve will lead us on a guided bird walk around the reserve. Entrance is at the corner of Nallhead Road and Main Street TW13 6ST Grid reference 116712 **Field Meeting**

Wednesday 14th December Christmas Social Evening, refreshments and a raffle. Marion and Chris Rider will give a short talk on The Burren, Co Clare, Ireland, A Unique Plant Area.

Wednesday 11th January at 8.15pm 2023 Dr Phil Cribb will give a talk on the Flora of Madeira and the Canaries.

Wednesday 8th February at 8.15pm Rebecca Kendrick, Thames Landscape Strategy Rewilding Arcadia Project Officer will give us a talk about her work with The Thames Landscape Strategy, a not for profit partnership. For more information visit www.thames-landscape-strategy.org.uk

Previous Events

Wednesday 18th May Sunbury Park led by Dr Phil Cribb and Moth trapping with John Maxen.

A group of 12 arrived at the main pay and display car park, for an evening walk looking for moths and identifying trees.

We walked through the walled area now used as the carpark where we saw a Chinese Sweetgum and a *Robinia pseudoacacia*, which produces nectar for bees, out into an open area of long grass of the park while John set up the moth trap. Here can still be seen remnants of the old field system. Trees were noted including the Atlantic Cedar, *Acer palmatum*, sweet chestnut trees, holly, sycamore, the Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) a native of north America and field maple. Woodpeckers could be seen here pecking at dead branches. There are several types of cedar trees including Atlantica, Atlas, Himalayan and Lebanon. White cedars were introduced by the seventeenth century botanist John Tradescant. We came across a Ha-ha brick wall against raised land that was originally built to keep grazing animals away from the mansion. This was commonly used in landscaped gardens and parks in the eighteenth century. It involved digging a deep, dry ditch. Just the beyond the Ha-ha can be found improved grassland. A mulberry tree was seen by the ruins of the old house. Three species of buttercup can be found here including the Bulbous buttercup and Common buttercup. Sweet Vernal Grass gives a smell which is a characteristic of old meadows. Also here is Woodruff, Common Bent, Yorkshire Fog, Stitchwort, Sedges, Sorrel, Coltsfoot, Cow Parsley and Pignut. Pignut, is part of the carrot family and a characteristic of old grassland. Several species of Oak were seen here such as Turkey Oak, Pyrenean Oak, Pedunculate Oak and Holm Oak.

We came to an area of finer grass, which can be traced back to when this area consisted of separate fields. Stitchwort and sheep's sorrel grew here. It was seen that Blackberry bushes are spreading due to lack of maintenance and grazing. Docks *Rumex acetosa* and *R. acetosella* were found growing together. Ant hills here are a characteristic of old grassland. Perennial ryegrass is found on improved grassland. Then we walked past a dip in the ground that could be a bomb crater from the last war and found clustered bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*), Herb Bennet and Soft brome/Sterile Brome. Then moving close to the road where there are Wild Cherry trees. Bluebells can be seen here in the Spring but are not natural to this site, having been planted. There are also Snowberry bushes, originally from the USA, Purple Hazel, Copper Beech, Norway Maple, Horse Chestnut, originally from Greece, Medic and Yarrow.

The best way to preserve the life of a tree is to pollard it. Ash trees that are suffering from Ash Dieback have a better chance of survival in a mixed woodland than in a clump of ash trees where disease can spread rapidly.

We came back to the moth trap but there had not been a great deal of moth activity with a *Monopsis* moth being identified.

A very enjoyable and informative evening walk.

Sunday 29 May Dr Phillip Cribb led a walk at Nonsuch Park for small blue and marbled white butterflies.

Nonsuch Park lies between Cheam and Ewell in the borough of Epsom and Ewell in Surrey. It is the last surviving part of the Park of Nonsuch, a deer hunting park established by Henry VIII where there was once the Nonsuch Palace.

We set off from the car park seeing a *Magnolia grandiflora* and a Cherry tree. We entered a walled garden with flower beds and a freestanding Wisteria. Nearby is Nonsuch Mansion House, (grade II Listed) dating from the mid 18th century, rebuilt about 1802 and situated at the centre of the park with a café. Here, in the laid-out gardens could be seen Sessile Oak trees Pedunculate Oak. One of the differences

between the two main types of oak are that, on the Pedunculate Oak the acorn stalk is long, while on Sessile Oaks the stalk is shorter). There were also Rowan and Lime trees. In the open grass area was seen Bulbous Buttercup, Queen Anne's Lace, Soft Brome and Perennial Ryegrass.

We walked through trees and hedgerow into Warren Farm which is maintained by the Woodland Trust. This park is a large area of open grassland and of woods, (53 acres), forming an important landscape feature in this urban environment. It has good views across the site. The woodland and scrub are around the perimeter of the fields and provides good habitats for flora and fauna. Here was found Marguerites, Red Clover, Ribwort Plantain, White Clover, White Campion, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Old Man's Beard, Yellow Rattle, *Orobanche*, Meadow Buttercup, Pyramid Orchids, Corn Sow-thistle, Veronica, Sweet Vernal Grass, Kidney Vetch and Alsike Clover. Small Blue Butterflies were seen here. These small butterflies are dark blue almost black are rare feeding on Kidney Vetch. They are priority species under the UK BAP status. Here there are also Brown Hairstreaks and White-letter Hairstreaks but none were seen today.

A very enjoyable morning walk around these two adjoining large parks, that are hidden gems in south London.

Monday 13th June Chobham Common - Nightjars. The group led by Eric Sloan, met in the evening at Fishpool car park, Gracious Pond Rd, and moved inland and heard Nightjars with the male's distinctive churring song, rising and falling, being nocturnal birds looking for food at dusk.

Wednesday 6th July Shortwood Common. Dr Phil Cribb led a group around Shortwood Common for an enjoyable evening walk.

Sunday 7th August at 10am Staines Moor Meet in Moor Lane led by Dr Phil Cribb for plants butterflies and other insects

On warm sunny morning we made our usual approach from Moor Lane over the railway bridge to Staines Moor. The weather had been especially hot and dry which showed in the rather dry appearance of the surrounding landscape. Phil showed there was plenty to be seen before reaching Staines Moor such as the Wall Rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*) which has established itself on the bridge wall, White Bryony (*Bryonia dioica*), Sloe or Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) with its shiny black Sloe berries rather early for this time of year probably because of the hot dry weather. Also seen, the non-native Buddlia (*Buddleja davidii*) introduced in the 1900s from China. Non-native can be considered neophytes as being recent introductions or more distantly introduced archaeophytes.

The river Colne passes through the moor carrying calcium carbonate rich water which provides conditions for plants such as the Nodding Thistle (*Carduus nutans*), its typical habitat is lime-rich but nutrient-poor grassland, a common species of chalky soils as is Spiny Restharrow (*Ononis spinosa*). There are four different species of thistle to be found on Staines Moor. As we passed under the bridge where murals of various birds and animals can be enjoyed sadly been defaced by graffiti. Staines Moor occurs on either side of the Staines Bypass. Entering onto the Moor under the Staines Bypass, there is an expanse of meadow before us, we came across the Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) and Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) a clover indicative of old pastures on damp alluvial or calcareous clay soils. Coming to the river Colne we saw Flowering Rush (*Butomus umbellatus*) also called Grass Rush, is a perennial aquatic plant growing in slow flowing water and not a true rush. Flowering plants are thought to have evolved from aquatic plants. Also found here was Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*) with its arrow shaped leaves and white flowers which are purple in the centre. Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) growing on the river bank and Sweet Flag (*Acorus calamus*) and Reed Sweet Grass (*Glyceria maxima*) a perennial found growing at the waters-edge. Marsh forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) also here found in and out of water and also plants of damp soil are Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Common Flea Bane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), the tall Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*) and Water Ragwort (*Senecio*

aquaticus) which has distinctive red stems larger flowers and a looser habit than the Common Ragwort with which it hybridizes. On drier ground we found Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*). It was here that a Small Heath Butterfly was seen. A kestrel and Heron were also seen.

At the far end of the moor is a mound which was once a rifle range along with what is now a pond and shallow wet area adding diversity to the moor. Behind the pond high in a tree was seen a Hobby observing the moor. In the shallow area could be seen Celery Leaved Buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*) which is found in damp places on the edges of ponds with petals that are rather smaller than those of other buttercups and also found here is Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*). In the pond was growing Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) important for breeding birds. Walking back completing our walk we came across in a stream Watercress (*Rorripa nasturtium aquaticum*), Water Speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*) and on the waters-edge, Marsh Woundwort (*Stachys palustris*) adding to our list of plants and in a damp hollow Mint and Fleabane grew in a clump. On the mint was found the Mint Moth, a tiny attractive moth with purple colouration and orange blotches. As always, a popular and enjoyable mornings walk.

Sunday August 14th at Hounslow Heath looking for adders

Hounslow Heath has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve and a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. It is lowland heath and dry acid grassland with scrub, woodlands and wetland areas. There has been an establishment of adders on Hounslow Heath. Adders were released onto the heath in 2000, now growing into a good population, some of which we were hoping to see this morning

We began our walk early in the morning on a warm sunny day. Eric Sloan led a group of eight, walking in a southwest direction. As the day was set to get hot so we made our way to the shade of the woods where Eric talked about interesting historic aspects. Hounslow Heath once covered more than 4000 acres of continuous landscape remnants of open green spaces which remain in surrounding areas. Now only 200 acres is all that remains of Hounslow Heath. Hounslow Heath has a long and eventful history. Once a deer park, became put to use as a military training ground at various times since the English Civil War. Gunpowder was produced during the 14th century and mills in the production of gunpowder are believed to have been established on Hounslow Heath. Hounslow Heath was notorious for Highway Men that plagued the highways across the heath including Dick Turpin. In 1800s a balloon race was held here and following the outbreak of World War I the Hounslow Heath Aerodrome was established becoming a fighter aircraft defence and training base. In 1919 it became the London Terminal Aerodrome for the first international commercial air service before the role was taken by Croydon airport in 1920 and returned to being used for military services and repair. The Vickers Vimy a long-range bomber was flown from here to Australia in 1919. A monument to the north of the heath commemorates the flight. A modern reproduction of the aircraft can be seen at the Brooklands Museum.

Emerging from the woods we began our search for Adders. The grass fire which had occurred a week earlier as a result of the exceptionally dry weather was evident leaving the heath blackened with charred trees and scrub. Amongst the hectares of heath that was damaged, unfortunately included habitat favoured by the adders. Adders like woodland and heathland. On Hounslow Heath they are often found in profusion amongst the bramble in scrub and grassland. There is fortunately plenty of habitat they can escape to, and it was here we continued our search for adders. Adders give birth to live young incubating their eggs internally. Searching amongst the brambles provided plenty of chance to enjoy the profusion of blackberries but despite our best efforts and disappointment, no Adders.

A visit to the wet area on the heath provided interest. A pond looking a little low on water, but even so a large blue green dragonfly was seen here which we identified as the Southern Hawker.
Thank you to Eric for making this morning enjoyable and interesting despite the lack of Adders.

Saturday March 4th Spring Social Evening 7.30pm

Annual Spring Social Evening Including Buffet, Raffle & Illustrated Talk

Lucy Smith, award winning botanical artist and illustrator from Kew will talk to us about her work on the

“The Giant Amazonian Waterlily”

Tickets: Adults £10.00, accompanied children free.

Please bring your own drink and glasses.

Email: info@snhsociety.org.uk for tickets.

What to look out for during the Autumn Months

After that hot period of weather, with the rain the countryside is green again. As we move to Autumn, there is a new season to enjoy as the leaves on the trees gradually change colour to red, golds and browns. Bird song becomes less now and some begin to mass for the late summer migration. If you find a patch of bramble, look out for warblers – Whitethroat and Blackcap who may be building up their energy before migrating by eating the Blackberries. Starlings may be seen in flocks, murmurations in the sky. Also Bats may be glanced darting across rivers as dusk falls. Late summer flowering plants come into prominence including Heathers, Jarrow, Cat’s-ear, Michaelmas-daisies and Field Scabious. Also can be seen spider’s and their webs covered in dew, butterflies, moths and of course, varieties of bees and wasps.

WILDLIFE RECORDING IN SPELTHORNE

Martin would like to receive any records that our members have of the wildlife they see or find within the Borough to add to the Societies database. Also any records that are made on Society visits to other areas and particularly on the annual Members Weekend, these records are passed to the local Natural History Society or to the Local County Recorders as appropriate.

All records are wanted, but they need to have a minimum of information for them to be valuable.

WHO - Who made the original observation and the name of the person who made the identification if different from the original observer.

WHAT - An unambiguous name for the specimen, preferably the scientific binomial if possible.

WHERE - A reasonably accurate location. preferably as a minimum 6 figure map reference.

WHEN - The date of the original observation.

Any other information that seems appropriate such as the Sex, Stage, i.e. larvae, Quantity etc., if appropriate, can be added. A spreadsheet can be provided for those that find them useful, phone and it can be emailed to you.

Please pass your records to Martin in whatever format is convenient to yourself. By email if possible, Royal Mail or just a phone call.

Email : martin[AT]halburnecology.co.uk (replace [AT] with @)

Phone : 07884 308454 to request the spreadsheet or report a sighting direct or indeed for the postal address. Thank you

Ash Link Local Nature Reserve

Ashlink is now formally recognised as a Local Nature Reserve. (Local Nature Reserves are a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949). The Management Plan has now been updated for the next 10 year period.

Work Group

The Society's nature conservation working group "The Friends of Ash Link Local Nature Reserve" (FOAL) has continued to meet, subject to restrictions and carry out works including the reduction of nettles and bindweed and pond clearance. A management plan has been completed.

The next newsletter will be out in the Winter



Poem

Summer (abridged) Christina Rossetti

Winter is cold hearted,
Spring is yea and nay,
Autumn is a weathercock
Blown every way.
Summer days for me
When every leaf is on its tree;

When Robin's not a beggar,
And Jenny Wren's a bride.
And larks hang singing, singing, singing,
Over the wheat-fields wide.....

Why one day in the country
Is worth a month in town;
Is worth a day and a year
Of the dusty, must, lag-last fashion
That days drone elsewhere.