

Eight of us gathered for our usual New Year meander on what proved to be a fine day. All along the paths as we walked were the healthy looking leaves of a crucifer, no doubt Rape; Margaret couldn't resist taking a few leaves to try cooked (it is a cabbage, after all) but they turned out to be very bitter.

The winter having been mild so far, the first things we saw of note were Hawthorn leaves beginning to show and also Coltsfoot in bloom, both along Cow Lane. In Chorlton Woods a previously unnoticed Sweet Chestnut was identified, and further on a mature tree, which seemed to be Hornbeam.

The star find of the day, after clambering through swamps, was the rush *Scirpus Sylvaticum*; the specimens looked very sad, having been flooded, but will be back again in the summer.

We spotted several Goldcrest, and on the way back found an old Elderberry, covered in Jews Ear fungus *Auricularia Auricula Judea*, Margaret tried these cooked too (the fungus, not the birds) but alas they were very rubbery.

Nine members met at Prestwich metro station, on a day, which threatened rain, but in the event stayed surprisingly fine. We walked up the main road and into Mere Clough. In spite of the neighbouring motorway, there was a lot of bird song with blue tits, great tits and wrens especially evident. Climbing out of the clough, we crossed the motorway and turned to the west. A large heron was observed in the wetland to the N.

We stopped for lunch in Philips Park, noting the extensive planting of primroses on the woodland edges. Then on down Philips Park Road and across the motorway to the Irwell, thence up Mere Clough back into Prestwich. Willow warblers and chiffchaffs were heard; there were good displays of wood anemone, but, in spite of searches, we did not see marsh marigolds, and found only one small patch of golden saxifrage after long searching.

Bats, butterflies, beetles, birds, dragonflies, water-voles, great crested newts and foxes inhabit this interesting area alongside all kinds of plants, mosses, liverworts, lichens and fungi. There is a wide diversity of habitat including ponds and larger stretches of water, boggy places, woodland and meadows. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest as well as a Local Nature Reserve.

Ten people arrived for our meeting, including one guest. Enthusiasm was not marred by the rather damp day. It was clear from the start that this was going to be a bryophyte and lichen day, as we were a little early for the best flowers. Besides we had all the experts out with us. We had not moved a few yards from the warden's hut when there were excited exclamations and shouts of '*Metzgerca fruticulosa!*' It is a rather rare liverwort found elsewhere on the Reserve, but this was a brand new location for it. Progress was rather slow as the tree on which it was found yielded a dozen or more bryophyte and lichen species – I was afraid we were going to be there all day! However we eventually moved off on our tour of the Claypits, which proved very rewarding.

We saw many more bryophytes. Two of the more interesting ones were called *Cryphea heteromalla* and *Ulotia phyllantua*. John & Helen Lowell and Audrey Locksley compiled a list of the species we saw which, when it was submitted later to the warden Mik Lees, he told me it included 13 new ones for the reserve, bringing the total up to 69 altogether. He was delighted. Fourteen different species of lichen were recorded by Owen McCann, some occurring in several places. This is also a very good total.

We must not forget flowering plants – Rixton includes the richest tetrad in SJ69. I was pleased that we added several more new ones to my list during our walk including *Tellima* (Fringe cups) and *Carex pendula* (Pendulous Sedge). We looked for *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (Adders Tongue) where Mik had indicated, but we were too early for it. It was good to see violets and other spring flowers, summer was just beginning.

Simister and River Irk

Maureen & Ron Davies

12th May

12 members met in Sainsbury's car park on a glorious day and walked along part of the River Irk to a bridge and steps, which took us to Middleton Road opposite the Three Arrows Pub. We crossed over and went up Old Hall Lane, crossed the motorway bridge and proceeded to the old cottages on Nut Lane, then on to Simister village. We intended to eat our lunch at the Same Yet pub and buy drinks, but the pub had been recently taken over, and the new residents were not as accommodating and cleared us off a grassy bank at the far end of the car park. This was disappointing, and we made our way out of the village and sat on a bank at the crossroads to eat our lunch. Up to now we had heard willow warblers, greenfinch, chaffinch and seen a heron, whilst here at our lunch stop we heard skylarks, and saw a field of plovers and swallows.

We continued up the lane leading to Heywood Old Road, passing the farm which used to charge cars a toll of 1 penny, but many motorists used to drive through at speed to avoid paying, and sometimes killed the farmers chickens, which ranged freely. Ron and I remember this about 40 years ago. We walked down Heywood Old Road to a farm, which has a private zoo where we have, in years past, been allowed by the owners to have a conducted tour. It is now very dilapidated, and many of the animals have gone. We were not able to see the llamas because of restrictions on the farm road, but we did see their tapir and some deer. Up a lane opposite to Rhodes Green which is pretty with a few cottages, then down to Rhodes village where most of us had ice-creams, then along to the River Irk. We saw a few frogs, another heron and some butterflies.

The butterflies seen were orange tip, tortoise-shell, peacock and meadow brown. Flowers – scurvy grass, stitchwort, lungwort, Solomon's seal, yellow loosestrife, Virginia stock, sunspurge, comfrey, rape, ladies smock, *Dicentra Formosa* and *Dicentra Spectabilis* (bleeding heart).

Paddington Meadows

Margaret McCormick

26th May

These meadows, which sit comfortably in a deep curving loop of the R. Mersey at Woolston near Warrington, contain some of the oldest hawthorn hedges in Cheshire. To see them at the end of May, on a warm, sunny day, is to see them at their very best.

Priscilla, Christine, Maurice and myself met at New Cut lane, Woolston on a bright morning that got progressively better and sunnier as it went on. We were in luck and the blossom was spectacular. Priscilla, always the dedicated recorder, soon had us all spotting every species of plant

and tree along the way. Christine, already an accomplished botanist, found herself learning to use the data card system as approved by vice-county recorders. 'I haven't got my bi-focals with me' she grumbled, peering at the very small print, and more scary, the abbreviated Latin names. She managed however, under Priscilla's expert guidance, and several extra species were added to the list started some time ago by the late Doris Nash who sadly died just before this walk took place. We were in somewhat reflective mood, this was her patch, she recorded it diligently, and we were remembering her, and how much she will be missed in the group.

Following the Old Cut path to the meadows we were soon walking alongside a fairly new hedge planted with Hazel, Holly, Field Maple, Oak and Spindle. Joining the river path we reached the line of ancient Hawthorns that circled the meadows.

A convenient bench that just fitted the four of us made a good lunch spot. Across the water a man was fishing, [showing the Mersey is much cleaner now]. The inevitable dog-walkers passed by, their charges showing acute interest in our lunch boxes.

Orange tip, White and Peacock butterflies bobbed among the Cow Parsley lining both banks, and all around us the heady scent of Hawthorn blossom.

After lunch we did a sort of figure of eight across the meadows, without retracing too much of the route. They did not render much interest plant-wise but a Reed-bunting twittered from a grass stalk and Whitethroat, Chaffinches and Starlings were noisy in the hedgerows. The meadows are now being managed by local farmers using traditional methods, so maybe they will recover and render some goodies for us to record in the future.

Alderley Edge

Dave Earl

23rd June

A party of seven met at the main car park near The Wizard restaurant. At the wooded entrance to the car park the 'Alderley Edge Bramble' was demonstrated to the members of the party. Discovered here by the leader in 1993, it was clear that the number of plants occurring at this location is increasing. Readers may remember that it was thought that a mystery bramble seen on the VC59 bank of the River Tame, at the Guide Bridge field meeting held on 4/9/1999, might be the Alderley Edge Bramble? I was able to return to Guide Bridge to confirm my suggestion. There is now a strong case of describing the Alderley Edge Bramble, a subject to discuss at the BSBI *Rubus* meeting to be held in Cheshire during 2002.

The area about Bradford Lane was once an area of moss-land. Although the mossland has been drained plants seen included –

Purple Moor Grass, *Molinia caerulea*,

Heath Bedstraw, *Galium saxatile*,

Star Sedge *Carex echinata*,

Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant*,

Bilberry, *Vaccinium myrtillus*

Wood Sorrel, *Oxalis acetosella*,

Wood Avens, *Geum urbanum*

and two members of Section *Rubus* Subsection *Rubus* that are characteristic of birch-oak woods on former moss-lands, *Rubus scissus* and the regional endemic *Rubus accrescens*. Other species of bramble seen here included the regional endemics *Rubus distractiformis* and *Rubus painteri*.

Onward via Windmill Wood we saw Speckled Woods and Glaucous Sweet-grass, *Glyceria declinata* to Sandhills. Here lunch was taken, during which time Sean Edwards of The Manchester Museum joined us to collect samples of algal crust for further study by Professor Edward Bellinger. 'The crust' has developed on an area of mine spoil upon which very few plants can grow. In contrast

a diverse flora has developed on the mosaic of habitats existing on the now colonised disturbed ground nearby. Plants seen included

| | |
|--|---|
| Broad-leaved Helleborine, <i>Epipactis helleborine</i> , | Centuary, <i>Centaureum erythraea</i> , |
| Glaucous Sedge, <i>Carex flacca</i> , | Oval Sedge, <i>Carex ovalis</i> , |
| Common Spotted Orchid, <i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i> , | Twayblade <i>Listera ovata</i> |
| Marsh Horsetail <i>Equisetum palustre</i> , | |
| Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, <i>Lotus pedunculatus</i> , | Marsh Thistle, <i>Cirsium palustre</i> , |
| Bulbous Rush, <i>Juncus bulbosus</i> , | Ragged Robin <i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i> , |
| Lady's Mantle, <i>Alchemilla xanthochlora</i> , | Purple Loosestrife <i>Lythrum salicaria</i> , |
| Yellow Loostrife <i>Lysimachia vulgaris</i> and a naturalised garden plant Siberian Iris, <i>Iris siberica</i> . | |

In a pond Water Violets *Hottonia palustris* still flourish, but for how long, because the invasive exotic water plant New Zealand Pigmyweed, *Crassula helmsii* has arrived?

An afternoon of sightseeing included visits to 'Castle Rock', 'Holy Well', 'Stormy Point' and 'Engine Vein' with Climbing Corydalis, *Ceratocarpus claviculata* being seen on route. The grand finale was a visit to a mine to see a moss which 'glows in the dark' known as Goblin Gold, *Schistostega pennata*. Not all of the attractions of Alderley Edge can be seen in one day and therefore another MFC visit will be arranged in due course.

A welcome member of our party was Galina Goussarova, working in the Herbarium and School of Biological Sciences at The University of Manchester and a fellow at the Department of Botany at The University of St. Petersburg. Galina's specialist interest is the Genus Euphrasia. She recognised many of the plants seen on our excursion, expressing a keen interest in the English names of wild flowers as well as explaining to us about the importance of Botany in the curriculum of medical students.

Littleborough

C. Walsh

30th June

Eight members and one guest assembled for a re-run of last years Hollingworth Lake walk. The field paths had been recently re-opened after the Foot and Mouth closures. All the species of last year were still present and John found a very interesting water plant, which was eventually identified as *Luronium Natans*.

The Dyers Greenweed looked much healthier this year and a field with many plants could be clearly seen across the stream. The field at the streamside was minutely inspected for sedges by our keen botanists, which would have made a good photo for the album.

Unfortunately the beautiful honeysuckle near the Visitor Centre had been 'tidied up' but we hope it will recover. After our Ice cream we meandered to the Nature Reserve area at the corner of the lake. Following a tip-off from the Warden one intrepid plant collector found the promised *Potentilla Palustris* and Narrow Buckler Fern as a bonus. We were unable to spot Great Burnet in the area suggested. The horse-trough with water starwort had also been tidied up, but a little remained at the edge, so all was not lost. A short diversion had to be taken due to reinstatement of the Rochdale Canal under the road at Smithy Bridge but no new species were added to our list. The records for three squares, thanks to John for SD91H, were sent to the VC Recorder.

Birds seen or heard included Willow Warbler, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Collared Dove, Sparrow, Blue Tit, Greenfinch, Wren and Lapwing.

Six members met Wendy at the green triangle of grass on Tyn y Coed Road, which is less than quarter of a mile from the main street of Llandudno. First viewings were made directly – knotted hedge parsley, musk stork'sbill only just surviving the council zeal with the weedkiller. On a wall nearby was white ramping fumitory and under the cliff on the other side of the tramway we were shown a great stand of milk thistle.

Across a field path from the end of the road, as the rougher ground started, all sorts of plants, known mainly from the books, were found. Perhaps past their best in flowering, it was worthwhile seeing their fruits. Carline thistle, wild madder, horseshoe vetch, dropwort, Nottingham catchfly, and spotted cat's ear were among the many seen. Dark red helleborine had great attention from photographers not always to its benefit. The lower slopes overlooking the town are being colonised by the strawberry tree introduced in Victorian times, and because of the foot and mouth epidemic this year, the grass was growing too much, and perhaps the rarer plants will suffer unless sheep can be re-introduced.

We dropped down into Haulfre Gardens, and saw several brassicas as weeds, and one stem of ivy broomrape. Down another rough bit of ground almost inaccessible were bright blue flowers of spiked speedwell. Other rapid colonisers of the Orme are various alien cotoneasters. The one native cotoneaster is *Cotoneaster cambricus* (formerly *C. intergerrimus*), which has been known on the Great Orme from 1783. Again this was situated in a more difficult bit of terrain, and it was the last species we went to look at as the misty drizzle started.

Many thanks were given to Wendy for giving up her time to show us the local treasures. The party finished the day off with a hearty fish and chips meal.

We started our day at Altrincham Crematorium, where most other people, locals anyway, usually finish theirs. Well, it was well signposted, a local bus stopped nearby, there was ample car-parking and a bench suitably placed where I could wait for folks to turn up. Only three others did, par for the course lately. However, it was the holiday season and we set off in fine weather, undeterred by the forecast that said rain later.

The foot & mouth problem prevented us from crossing farmland by the new permissive field paths, so we crossed Sinderland Rd. and took the Dark Lane path onto Carrington Moss. There was a spindle tree along the hedge, among the hawthorn and bramble, and butterflies were out in great numbers, attracted by the knapweed and other wild flowers.

From a field, golden with ripe wheat on our left came a strange call, a bird, but surely not a native to this area. It called again and out of the wheatfield flew a yellow, black and white bird with a long tail. It disappeared into Brookheyes Covert opposite but continued to call. I called back, well I would wouldn't I? It answered, and well, I won't bore you but it was obviously unable to resist my 'birdspeak'. It flew out and landed on the path at our feet! It had an orange crest raised cheekily as it surveyed us. It was a Cockatiel! It was quite a tame little creature obviously used to humans and took wheat seeds from my hand but refused to hop on my finger. Pity, as I quite fancied walking over the moss with a parrot on my shoulder, but it would have none of it and as we didn't have much to offer beside egg sandwiches and Roger's Mum's home made bread in the way of parrot

wildfowl, which arrives later in autumn. A Great Spotted Woodpecker, Coal Tits and Long-tailed Tits were added to the bird list at the car park feeding station.

A delightful outing in good company!

Delamere Forest

Peter and Diana White

20th October

The rain lashed down whilst we were on the way to Delamere, but fortunately held off for the whole of the walk while we kept our eyes to the ground looking for fungi. Fortunately some of our members are becoming real experts in the mycology field, so most species were identified.

There was a record turn out of 12 members and 11 visitors, most of the latter having found out about our walk thanks to the mention Tom Waghorn had given us in his Manchester Evening News column.

We made some outstanding finds, the stars being the dog stinkhorn; a huge spread out group of *Clavariadelphus fistulina*, which is an elegant tall thin stem; a cluster of numerous magnificent earth stars and the 2 splendidly curly helvella species. Many photographs were eagerly taken.

We saw great spotted woodpecker and long tailed tit along the paths and also teal on the flooded moss.

Here is the full list of fantastic fungal finds

| <u>Scientific name</u> | <u>Country name</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Nectria cinnabarina</i> | Coral spot |
| <i>Mycena alcalina</i> | |
| <i>Xylaria hypoxylon</i> | Candle snuff |
| <i>Mycena falopus</i> | |
| <i>Bjerkandera adjusta</i> | Smokey bracket |
| <i>Armillaria mellea</i> | Honey fungus |
| <i>Stereum hirsutum</i> | |
| <i>Phallus impudicus</i> | Stinkhorn |
| <i>Calocera viscosa</i> | |
| <i>Mycena galericulata</i> | |
| <i>Gymnopilus penetrans</i> | |
| <i>Russula cyanoxantha</i> | The charcoal burner |
| <i>Mutinus caninus</i> | Dog stinkhorn |
| <i>Amanita citrina</i> | False death cap |
| <i>Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca</i> | False chanterelle |
| <i>Amanita muscaria</i> | Fly agaric |
| <i>Boletus erythropus</i> | |
| <i>Psathyrella hydrophila</i> | |
| <i>Geastrum sessile</i> | Earth star |
| <i>Clavariadelphus fistulina</i> | |
| <i>Helvella crispa</i> | White saddle fungus |
| <i>Helvella lacunosa</i> | Grey saddle fungus |

Indoor meetings

Fungi

Norman Bamforth

13th October

Norman's slides, as always, were well up to his usual stunning quality. If you know nothing about fungi, and are not remotely interested in the subject, you could still not help but be dazzled by the variety of colour and shapes of the 'goodies' that appeared on screen.

No apology was needed for the fact that some of the slides were taken around twenty-five years ago. Some had even been prize-winners at Norman's local photographic society at the time, and even after all that time, they had lost nothing in splendour. Others, equally spectacular, were as recent as the previous weeks walk at Wayoh, where a particularly rare specimen, that of *Volvariella Bombycina* was captured on camera, and delighted the fungal enthusiasts among us.

From the big colourful crimson caps of the Fly Agaric to the minute details of tiny *Ascomycetes*, they were all of a quality we have come know and expect from this talented and knowledgeable member of our group.

Margaret McCormick