

Upper Onny Wildlife Group PLANT GROUP REPORT and INVASIVE SPECIES PROJECT REPORT 2018

Plant Group report

From the initial meetings of the Stiperstones- Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme at Hyssington, Churchstoke and Chirbury a number of people expressed interest in forming a plant group.

In 2015 we decided to run the three CWG plant groups together and in 2016 and 2017 we continued to do this. With the ending of the LPS we have focused particularly on work connected with the road verge projects and the future potential Stepping Stones project.

Plants & Wild Flowers (outings and training days)

These events are in the areas of the Camlad, Rea Valley and Upper Onny Wildlife Groups and are open to anyone interested in plants, whether you are a complete beginner, an experienced botanist or are somewhere in between.

Sunday 15th April

Ancient tree walk. Visit around Hyssington measuring and recording some of the old oak pollards and the churchyard yews. A great turnout of 20 people.

Sunday 13th May. We ran two sessions around Norbury, in conjunction with the road verge project, introducing and identifying the wild flowers to be found in the verges, and the importance of conserving them.

Tuesday 22nd May

Linley Big Wood. A day looking at woodland plants and helping to carry out a habitat survey for the Stepping Stones Project



Friday 22nd June. Hay meadows and pasture at Old Churchstoke.

We surveyed this series of traditional, flower-rich hay meadows on behalf of the Montgomery Wildlife Trust. Its specialities include Pepper-saxifrage.

Saturday 30th June. Bogs and butterflies, Corndon. This is a botanically rich site, on the east of Corndon, for plants of wetlands and also the Small pearl-bordered and Dark green fritillary butterflies. Again we were recording on behalf of the MWT.

Friday 13th July Meadow Grasses workshop at the Natural England Office, Pennerley on the edge of the Stiperstones. In the morning there was an introduction to grasses found in

meadows and in the afternoon the opportunity to look at grasses of other habitats around the Bog.

Wednesday 1st August Hope Valley. We explored this richly-varied site which is a Local wildlife site and includes woodland, streams, meadows and mires. Although there have been many visits here it is a large site and often turns up new species, in this case Broad leaved sedge [*Carex laevigata*]

Tuesday 7th August A workshop entitled Sphagnum for Beginners was run at the Natural England Office on the Stiperstones and on the east side of the reserve. This was led by Martin Godfrey who is an inspiring, knowledgeable and enthusiastic teacher.

Sunday 21st October Fungi Identification, Snailbeach

A morning identifying fungi in the woodland around an above Snailbeach with the Shropshire fungi group A total of 57 species were recorded some of which were quite unusual and the highlight being a small parasitic fungi *Tolypocladium capitatum* that resembles matchsticks growing on a buried False truffle [*Elaphomyces granulatus*], last recorded in Shropshire in the 1800's

Verge Surveys

These surveys started in 2015, and approximately 170 kilometres of verges in the Upper Onny area, 130 km in the Rea Valley area and 80 km in the Camlad Valley area have been completed. This information has now gone onto the Shropshire Council GIS data base. If we can find the remaining species rich verges we can feed this information to Shropshire and Powys Councils who, hopefully with the help of local Parish Councils [some of whom have already expressed interest], will manage these verges in a more sympathetic way.

From this has emerged in 2017 [and continued in 2018] a verges project called 'Life on the Edge'. This was instigated by Myndtown combined parish council and is centred round Norbury, Wentnor and Ratlinghope.

A similar project ran in Edgton parish this year and we are working with the National Trust on some sites near Wentnor.

We will continue looking for and surveying unimproved meadows in 2019 and working with the Marches meadow group.

Recording for the Shropshire Wildlife Trust

In addition to the above outings the Shropshire Wildlife Trust arranged for the group to monitor several Wildlife Sites and potential Wildlife Sites.

All these sites were surveyed and

- The different habitats mapped (with reference to plant communities where possible)
- The condition of each habitat assessed
- A full plant list produced
- Other species of interest noted
- Photographic record made
- We visited wetland, grassland and woodland sites and mostly they were in good condition.

We also visited 4 sites on the Welsh side of the border on behalf of the Montgomery WT as part of their Wildlife Site project and had records sent to the Montgomery Flora and MWT. Fungi records went to the Shropshire Fungi Group.

Many of the same people involved have also helped with for Caring for God's Acre fungi surveys of churchyards and burial grounds in Hope, Snailbeach, More, Bishops Castle and Ratlinghope.



Small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly

We also undertook 3 practical conservation workdays at separate sites around Corndon clearing scrub and bracken to help wetland sites for plants and the Small pearl-bordered and Dark green fritillary butterflies.

Many thanks to everybody that came on the outings and especially those who contributed as surveyors, tutors, owners and managers of the sites we visited.

Rob Rowe
Plants Group organiser

Invasive Plant Species

Himalayan balsam and Japanese Knotweed are non-native invasive plants that are colonising many rivers and streams. The Group secured funding for a fourth year from the AONB Conservation Fund, for a project to eradicate them where possible.

Himalayan balsam was found right at the top of the West Onny just into Wales at White Grit, in a tributary near the Bog, and there were large amounts along the Crifin Brook. Pulling it up has been the major part of the project. We have now worked downstream nearly as far as Horderley, and many areas are now clear.

In 2018, volunteers were recruited to help with clearance again, and the National Trust volunteers came for two days, working on the Plowden estate, making a total contribution of 48 volunteer days.

Japanese knotweed was only located in a few places.

When approached, all landowners were sympathetic, and some had already been controlling the balsam. A flyer was produced for landowners about both species and how to control them.

The problem is being kept under control with much less of the Balsam occurring now higher in the catchment, unlike in other river systems where it is totally out of control. The project will hopefully continue in 2019. A full report can be found on the website.

Rob Rowe
Project organiser