

Botanical Group Activities 2023

The Botanical Group visited 4 survey sites during the summer months of 2023. The group is about ten in number. Our botanical skills are only moderate; we enjoy learning from each other, working through keys to identify not-so-easy species, cheating sometimes by using a phone plant-ID app. For each site we simply compile a list of vascular plant species found, noting especially any Shropshire axiophytes – notable (not necessarily rare) species ‘worthy of protection’ which are typically only found in a particular habitat. Lists are passed to the owner, perhaps with comments and management suggestions. We are also trying to submit lists to iRecord, though this is not proving straightforward; we have a backlog of records to submit.



Figure 1: Wood Anemone

Bushmoor Coppice SO 429879

Bushmoor Coppice Nature Reserve is an ‘orphan’. It used to belong to Shropshire Wildlife Trust but several years ago, we understand, it was handed over to the Shropshire Ornithological Society. Pied Flycatcher and Dormice have been recorded there in the past. Little management appears to have happened recently; paths are overgrown, stiles are broken, and log bridges over brooks and wet patches have rotted.

This beautiful reserve is about 2¼ ha of mixed woodland of mainly ash, cherry and oak, with shaded streams with wet margins of alder and goat willow. Supposedly it is a remnant of what the valley might have looked like after the last ice-age, but before Neolithic farming. Aspen, Guelder Rose and Wych Elm are frequent in places. The ground flora is species-rich. We recorded 72 plant species including 11 axiophytes: Wood Anemone, Wood Sedge, Golden-scaled Male Fern, Marsh Willowherb, Sweet Woodruff, Bluebell, Yellow Archangel, Wood Melick, Sanicle, Marsh Valerian and Wood Speedwell. Other ‘nice-to-find’s were abundant Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage, Pignut, Three-nerved Sandwort, and Greater Stitchwort.



Figure 2: Toothwort

Helmeth Wood SO469938

This ancient semi-natural woodland of 24 hectares is a gem on our doorstep, well known locally for its spectacular bluebell display and its rich ground flora. The majority of the wood is of coppiced Sessile Oak last coppiced perhaps during WW1, but some of the multi-stem trees show evidence of multiple coppicing going back several hundred years. Birch, Ash and Alder dominate the steep northern/north eastern slopes. The Ash in particular succumbed to a storm a few years ago with many tall trees uprooted. This may be no bad thing in the long run because the wood as a whole is uniformly mature with little regeneration. Where trees have fallen, the broken canopy will hopefully result in more diversified ground flora and tree regeneration. A less fortunate effect of the storm is that the circular path is now blocked and the north side is inaccessible.

We recorded 84 species including 9 axiophytes: Ramsons (Wood Garlic), Golden-scaled Male-fern, Bluebell, Yellow Archangel, Toothwort, Wood Melick, Wood-sorrel, Grey Willow and Wood Speedwell. The Toothwort was a particularly interesting find; the non-green plant parasitises the roots of various species, in Helmeth wood it was found under Ash and Hazel.

Small-leaved Lime is present in Helmeth Wood. We couldn’t find it; perhaps it is on the NE side, now inaccessible to the public. We also hunted unsuccessfully for Moschatel known to be

present at the NW end; we were too late in the season. We found Crosswort at the edge of the wood, a species which according to the Shropshire Flora is in rapid decline – perhaps because it is usually a road verges plant.

Coppice Leasowes Nature Reserve West SO459940

The wetlands side of this Town Council owned reserve collects waters from Ash Brook coming from Carding Mill Valley. The brook bends north forming the headwaters of the Cound. In



Spring 2022 the Council received a slow-the-flow grant from the Severn Rivers Trust to re-dig old and dig new scrapes and ponds. Our visit was to see how the site had re-vegetated. Much of the bare soil was colonised by pioneer species like the annual Water-pepper, but in later years these no doubt will give way to slower-to-establish annuals and perennials.

We recorded 90 vascular plant species including 2 axiophytes; Common Sedge and Creeping Forget-me-not. We found Ragged Robin and Purple Loosestrife which hadn't been recorded there previously. The Reserve is vulnerable to a number of invasive aliens. Indian Balsam is

Figure 3: Coppice Leasowes West - North end

present; it spreads in from the railway embankment and requires annual roguing. Monkey Flower and Pink Purslane are present but are probably not too much of a problem. Japanese Knotweed and American Skunk Cabbage are present in the adjacent Town Park but have so far been kept out of the Reserve.

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Cudwell Meadow SO459940

This 0.9ha wetland meadow has been surveyed annually over the last 3 years resulting in a cumulative list of 168 vascular plant species. In a couple of hours we recorded 102 species including 4



axiophytes: Bluebell, Changing Forget-me-not, Creeping Forget-me-not and Yellow Rattle.

The flora appears to be changing, probably due to two factors; the change from grazed pasture to grazing plus haylage making, and in the last



Figure 4: Ragged Robin

couple of years the period of inundation has been longer.

Figure 5: Cudwell Meadow and scrape - west end

Finally

We plan to continue meeting in 2024. If you are interested in joining us, and / or if you've suggestions of sites to visit, please get in touch.

Thanks to: Sue Rooney, Frances and Frank Hay, Vivienne and Peter Thorpe, Di Long, Kate Hudson, Janet Martin, Margaret Westhead, Gill Silk, Gay Walker.

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