

## **Fromus reserve: April 2015 report**

### **A place of beauty and peace**

April 14<sup>th</sup>, and up here on top of the striking earthwork dam that is the highest point of the Fromus meadows nature reserve, I can't help but ponder. The men who laboured long and hard here, somewhere in the medieval period, built something of beauty, by muscle power and eye alone. The level of the horizontal span and the curve of the cross section are nearly as uniform as the boulder beach groynes recently built at Felixstowe, using every modern mechanical aid, and guided by GPS. Mostly though, I soak up the spring sun and reflect that Trust benefactor Francis Simpson would have been delighted to see the drifts of wild flowers. The primroses and false oxlips are a sight to see, and here are two plants I missed last year — bugle, and three-veined sandwort.

Dog's mercury was abundant in the hedgerows and copses of ancient Kelsale Park, and it is here at my feet, with the starry little sunbursts of lesser celandine, ground ivy and also sweet violet. It is a reliable indicator of antiquity. Another excellent indicator is wood anemone, and yet it is not in the Reserve, and neither are bluebell and wood sorrel. Conceivably, at any time between the reign of the Bigod family and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a type of activity in Kelsale Park may have been hostile to the missing species. Free-ranging pigs rooting and rummaging beneath the trees would do the trick.

The hornbeam trees in the Gorge are producing dangling tassels of flowers. By autumn, they will sport countless hanging pagoda-like pods containing seeds. The hazel catkins have done their work and are shrivelling as the first leaves burst from their buds.

Warm sun, and I can hear wren, chiffchaff, blackcap, robin and mistle thrush. A kestrel slices the sky, and long-tailed tit and great tit flit through the scrub. Warmth is what the insects have been waiting for, for weeks, and it is good to see a peacock butterfly, and also a small tortoiseshell. Buff-tailed and red-tailed bumblebees are lumbering amongst the violets, with a single tawny mining bee. The flowers of ground ivy are irresistible to darting, hovering bee flies.

The meadows have changed from drab winter green to spring green. There is little growth visible, apart from a few pioneer stems of meadow foxtail – the first meadow grass to flower in the reserve. Close to the ground, dandelion flowers are attracting small, black pollen beetles, and the threadlike leaves of pignut are everywhere.

Soon, the ever-strengthening sun will trigger the growth of the crop of hay in the meadows: before then, we will revel in a sea of buttercups and cuckoo flowers, and delight in the reappearance of our southern marsh orchids.

*Laurie Forsyth*