

## **May 2015 report for Orchid Glade**

### **Raindrops and young, green leaves**

May 5<sup>th</sup>, and the Orchid Glade is as waterlogged as I have ever seen it, because rain fell all night. The wind is strong today: the sun breaks through every now and then, and then the reserve is flooded by the brilliant greens unfolding across the reserve. The birds are happy with the weather, and blackbird, wren and blackcap are all singing unseen in the thickets. The springtime growth of plants has moved into top gear, and rain is exactly what they need. Spear thistle and marsh thistle are completing their artistic leaf rosettes, and their tall flower spikes will soon rise in search of the sun, to the delight of every passing insect.

Today, the buffeting wind brings the scent of flowering rape from adjoining fields, but it has grounded the insects. As usual here in the early Spring, virtually every flower in sight is ground ivy – the bane of rabbits. At my feet, I spot small, early spikes of common horsetail. If ever a plant was a born survivor, this is it. With the hand of every gardener against it, horsetail persists unperturbed in lawn and flowerbed, rockery and herb garden. Once, far back in time when the planet was younger and warmer, the ancestors of the diminutive horsetail lived in great steamy swamps, and were the size of trees.

A sea of young plants smothers the ground on all sides, identifiable only by their leaves. Yet again I boggle at the staggering variety of leaf shapes that nature has created. Big leaves, tiny leaves, round, oval, narrow, wide, hairy, smooth, serrated, rough, shiny - every shape and texture is perfectly suited for its purpose in ensuring the survival of the species. Several different leaf shapes may be found on the same plant in some species, and each with its own function.

Rabbits are territorial, and in a flat meadow they will use any raised feature they think will give them a competitive edge. Often it is an anthill: perched on top, the rabbit surveys his domain and marks the anthill with droppings, so that the neighbours recognise his property. The flora on the anthill benefits from being fertilised by the droppings, and is lusher and greener. Tree stumps are used at the Orchid Glade for the same purpose. Several fruit trees are flowering.

There goes a hare, at walking pace because he knows there is no threat. Grasses and sedges have been heavily grazed for months by deer, rabbits and hares, but now their growth is accelerating. Wood sedge and glaucous sedge are flowering around the pond. I can see leaves of fleabane, hoary ragwort, willowherb, corn mint, square-stemmed St John's wort, selfheal, common mouse ear, bird's-foot trefoil, centuary, hairy St John's wort and many leaves of southern marsh orchid and twayblade orchid. New today to my personal records are three very common plants — lords and ladies (*Arum maculatum*), Herb bennet (*Geum urbanum*) and common daisy (*Bellis perennis*).

*Laurie Forsyth*