

## **Orchid Glade: June 2015 report**

### **Reflections on the pond**

June 9<sup>th</sup>, and the Orchid Glade flora is smoothly slipping through the gears in warm sunshine laced with a chilly wind. It is only a short time since I was last here, but growth has been startling. Meadow buttercups are in flower, with selfheal, ground ivy and the very first marsh thistles: the thistles can reach a height of six feet, and I can see their stick-like shapes all around, straining to outpace the growth of competitive neighbours before they are overwhelmed.

The pond looks almost lifeless today, but that is its normal face. Normal – but completely out of step with the vibrant nature reserve. Water is a great asset to wildlife wherever it is found, and especially so in a nature reserve because it is a focus for dragonflies, water beetles, caddis flies, newts and frogs. Life teems in a healthy pond. Species are dependent upon water for survival, and their presence adds beauty and interest for whoever passes by. Small though it is, our little pond should be a hotspot of life within the Orchid Glade.

Assuming the water in the pond is good, pure rainwater, the problem seems to be the willows growing on the banks and in the pond itself. They suck water from the pond, and cast shade on part of the water surface – shaded areas are good, in a healthy pond – but every autumn they also drop leaves that sink, and rot on the pond bed. The rotting process leads to the depletion of oxygen in the water, which in turn leads to depleted flora and fauna. Today, the pond water is gin-clear, with no green that would suggest the presence of microscopic plants and animals that are the base of the pond food pyramid. Worse – there are no aquatic plants to provide oxygen to the water, and food, cover and shade to pond life. The problem is very common, and can be solved.

The allure of orchids is well known. If you find one, you try to find more, and everything else can be forgotten. Today, there is a thin scattering of southern marsh orchid flower spikes across most of the more open areas of the Orchid Glade. I spot scores of half-developed flower spikes. About a dozen have spotted leaves and may be the leopard orchid form of this plant. I have probably missed many which have had their flower spike removed by rabbits and hares. There are also a few flower spikes of the strange-looking common twayblade orchid.

The pond overflowed into a large area of grassland during the winter, keeping it suitably squelchy for marsh orchids and marsh thistles, and also common fleabane and square stemmed St John's wort – two of the major providers of both colour and nectar for insects in the months to come.

***Laurie Forsyth***