

SFPT Orchid Glade report for October 2015

Another sort of colour

October 21st: Autumn is gathering pace in Orchid Glade Reserve. A few flowers are still visible, but the colour that splashes the Orchid Glade today is coming from the tints and hues of Autumn. Field maple, lime, hornbeam and ash glow in a variety of yellows and russets, and dogwood leaves are pink. Bees, wasps, hornets, flies and butterflies are being attracted by the tiny flowers of ivy — their last source of nectar for the year. Very many young trees — oak, ash, alder, hawthorn — have recently been felled to ensure the future of the meadow flora that is the main reason the site is a nature reserve. Management is also going on to remove willows that have been the root cause of the pond's decline in recent years

Today is windless. In a nearby thicket, a robin is composing his melancholy song for Autumn, which is very different to the sprightly and upbeat song he delivers in the Spring. 'He' may well be a she: I think the sexes are identical. Both sing, which is very unusual, and each maintains and defends its own winter territory, even in the coldest weather. Chubby and friendly he may look as he perches on your spade, but when his territory is threatened the robin turns into an aggressive street fighter. The UK population has increased in recent years to nearly seven million breeding pairs, due to milder winters.

I can hear something that is in utter contrast to the music of the robin. Close to the Reserve, a buck fallow deer is challenging his rivals: the sound is unmistakable — a loud and deep-pitched belch or groan. Fallow deer and muntjac deer often enter the reserve and do a little browsing here and there, although not enough to check the rampant growth of young trees and scrub. This is the rutting season for deer, and the buck is fired with testosterone. The bucks are about to go head to head, literally.

October is the time of spiders, of craneflies, and also of fungi. I have seen them all today, but the only one I can name is a very fine shaggy inkcap toadstool, erect in the grass. Soon, this glistening white drumstick will dissolve into a black liquid mess containing millions of spores. Two male pheasants ignore me as they joust in a blur of wing-whirring and loud 'kok-kok-kok' challenges. They rocket away over the trees, and the Orchid Glade falls silent.

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