

## **SFPT December 2015 report for the Orchid Glade**

### **Deer, moss and barbed wire**

Today — 10<sup>th</sup> December — is my last visit to the Orchid Glade this year, and it's a beauty, with cloudless blue sky and warmth more like Spring than mid-winter. The nature reserve needs natural grazers and browsers, otherwise it will lose much of its remaining open areas to young woodland. Fallow deer leap the barbed wire fence and work their way through the thickets, browsing as they go. The same small herd of deer probably visits the reserve every night, and judging by the signs, they follow the same route every time. Deep slots – their footprints – are cut into soft ground, and they are easy to spot. Less obvious are the torn edges on one side of a shoot that has been browsed. Deer do not possess upper incisor teeth: their lower incisors cut cleanly on one side of the shoot, but then the cut turns into a rip, leaving a torn edge on the other side that is diagnostic. Like the water tanks at Fromus Meadows that trap insects, the barbed wire fencing at the Orchid Glade collects useful evidence of what's about. The lowest strand of wire may catch the fur of rabbits, hares or a passing badger: today, I can see the middle strand has snagged a tuft of fallow deer hair.

Blackbirds are clucking quietly to themselves as they polish off the remaining hawthorn berries in the thickets, and a woodcock suddenly rockets vertically from the long grass and is gone. I have never in my life seen a woodcock that has not seen me first. The same is true of buzzards: their wonderful vision misses nothing, but because they are usually at what they think is a safe distance, they remain unconcerned. Sure enough, the buzzard wheeling above has more important things than me to think about as he circles with broad wings held at ten-to-two o'clock.

In the summer, we record the plant species in the swards of flowers thronging the Orchid Glade. A good, hot day is also the best time to record the legions of insects attracted to the nectar and pollen of the flowers. Right now - in mid-winter - is the best time to record moss. Mosses are described as 'low' plants: they have no roots, leaves or seeds, are anchored to the soil by thin, threadlike hairs, and have tissues just the thickness of a single cell. Hundreds of moss species flourish in shady, damp places throughout Suffolk, and Richard Fisk has found 40 in the Orchid Glade, including olive beard moss, blueish veilwort, Bruch's pincushion, dilated scale moss and bird's claw beard moss – what wonderful names!

Winter is also the time for fungi, and the piles of dead wood heaped at the edges of thickets are being recycled by many species. Several logs are almost covered by a small fungus that glows orange in the sun. Neil Mahler, our fungi recorder, has identified them as the bracket fungus hairy curtain crust – it is a very early coloniser of newly cut wood.

*Laurie Forsyth*