

## **SFPT Orchid Glade report for February 2016**

### **February fill-dyke**

It is hard to imagine the Orchid Glade being any wetter than it is at the moment. The pond has doubled its area, and the water is seeping into the saturated grassland. The place is turning into a wetland before my eyes. A heron just flapped off the pond — a bird I have not seen here before. No doubt, from whatever height the heron was flying, the pond and its marshy surroundings looked a good prospect for a meal, but close up, an angler as expert as a heron would quickly recognise a near-lifeless pond when it saw one. A priority for the Trust will be to bring the pond back to good health, and much work has already been done.

I always see a woodcock in the reserve in my winter visits. Today, four have taken to the air successively as I neared them, in a five-minute period. I wonder how many more woodcock there might be scattered on the wet ground beneath the trees, crouching in their wonderful camouflage plumage to watch me pass.

Seven fallow deer skip one after the other from a thicket and head for the fence on the other side of the Reserve. They are long gone when I arrive there, but their deep slotted footprints are easy to see, and — once again — at least one has brushed the barbs on the fence and lost some fur. Fox droppings mark a territorial boundary. A hare lopes off into the thickets, and a solitary rabbit scurries beneath the fence into the woodland next door.

There are few insects about at the moment, so trees that flower in January and February rely on the wind to distribute their pollen. Long, dangling catkins carry the male flowers, and are designed to catch every breath of a passing breeze. Hazel has been flowering for weeks, and is now joined by alder. I touch an alder catkin, and a puff of yellow pollen floats away, even though the air is still. Near the gate there is a patch of wild arum, or lords and ladies: soon, the mysterious and sinister looking spathe will emerge from the cluster of bright green new leaves, and commence a train of events that will culminate in the autumn in a cluster of brilliant red berries on a green stalk. Magical.

***Laurie Forsyth***