

SFPT Orchid Glade April report

Squelchy spring in the Orchid Glade

It is nearly six weeks since I was last here, but today (19th April) the reserve is as wet as ever. Spring is breaking out all over in a welter of different shades of green, and I can hear blackbird and chaffinch song from nearby. A woodpigeon has just burst from the top of an ash tree, and is looping up and down over the reserve: at the top of each loop, it noisily claps its wings to tell the neighbours to stay away. Its twiggy nest is in one of the thickets. I can hear a blackcap singing, and on the way here I saw a swallow, so it seems that the wind is now favourable for migrants.

The grazing pressure on the ground flora of the Orchid Glade has been intense throughout the winter, but now the trees and scrub are providing luscious new leaves that should divert the rabbits, hares and deer from the massed flora that provides the magnificent display in the summer. Today, I have seen the new leaves of southern marsh and twayblade orchids. The meadow flora of the reserve is a late starter, compared to the springtime display in woodlands. By the time the flowers here are at their best, the woodland display will be long gone.

The pond is brimming and will be a valuable wildlife feature when plants begin to colonise the bare banks, as planned. In the shallow water around the edges – the zone that becomes dry land when the water level falls in the summer – there is activity from several species of aquatic beetles that are sculling through submerged moss, and occasionally rising to the surface for a quick breath of air. Above them, and riding on the meniscus film are many whirligig beetles that look like tiny dodgem cars as they twist, turn and collide. Few flowers escape the rabbits here at this time of year — except ground ivy. The distasteful oils concentrated in its flowers and leaves guarantee it will be left alone, and that is good news for the bee fly. With wings moving in a blur, the furry bee fly hovers in front of the ground ivy flower, and sips nectar through its long proboscis.

The clay bank behind the pond may date from when the pond was first excavated. Today, several large queen buff-tailed bumblebees are investigating the scrub on the bank, hoping to find sites where they can nest and create new colonies. Watching them through binoculars, I almost overlook a comma butterfly basking on a bramble. The clay bank is muddy with the imprint of fallow deer tracks, and tussocks of wood sedge are spreading around the pond.

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