

# SFPT Fromus Valley meadows June 2016 report

## Sunlit meadows

June 9<sup>th</sup>, and the A12 traffic is steady as it hurtles past the wooden field gate at the entrance to our Fromus Meadows nature reserve. Just inside the gate is a short and narrow lane that takes visitors deeper into the reserve, to where the meadows begin. The little lane — on both sides — is packed with wild plants that most visitors don't see, because they are concentrating on driving to the car park beyond the second gate.

This morning, I noted nearly fifty species in the lane between the two gates, which is about 25% of the plant species recorded for the entire reserve, not counting the trees and shrubs. Nothing I found is rare, and nothing has real beauty or a superb scent, but it is good to find a community of typical Suffolk wayside species quietly existing within yards of the mayhem on the A12. The overhanging trees allow dappled sunshine into the lane, and the effect created is like a woodland clearing: sure enough, a speckled wood butterfly — a woodland species — appeared out of nowhere.

*"There's a bright golden haze in the meadow"*, as the song tells us, and this morning it is true. Mostly, the haze is of countless buttercups: in mid-June, the taller meadow buttercups overtop the low, creeping buttercups. Some of the grasses are even higher: meadow foxtail, false oat grass, crested dogstail and red fescue sway in the breeze, and down below, nestling at their feet are the yellow flowers of lesser trefoil, birds eye speedwell, birds foot trefoil and the wonderful small white stars of lesser stitchwort. I think that this year, the flora of the meadows is the best I have seen, which says much for our haycut/grazing management.

Each meadow is subtly different. Surprisingly, although it has at the moment forty or more fine southern marsh orchids, the meadow where they live is not the best, to my eye, although it also has pignut and cuckoo flower in the spring. We have a lot to learn about meadows, their flora and their management.

As usual, I have a look at the muddy, water-filled tractor ruts, where several surprise plants have shown up in the past. The water level is low, but thread-leaved crowfoot — a white, aquatic buttercup — looks happy, although the pink water speedwell is reduced to a handful of plants. True to its reputation, I have now found a single plant of lesser spearwort, which is not at all rare, but is still a new record for the reserve. I think that perhaps this little boggy bit has history. It lies in a dip in a gap in a hedge, and possibly livestock, carts, tumbrels and tractors have repeatedly churned it into mud for generations: it may even be the last vestige of a farm pond that could have many plant seeds locked in its mud.

*Laurie Forsyth*