

SFPT report for Orchid Glade July 2016

The Orchid Glade looks very promising

I predict a remarkable eruption of colour from myriad flowers in the next few weeks at our Orchid Glade reserve. The recent heavy rain showers have stimulated a great outburst of growth, particularly of common fleabane, hoary ragwort and hairy St John's wort. It is 7th July: hot, and sunny. The sun is beating down on the sodden soil, creating high humidity that is perfect for very many insects — some of which are glorious to see, and some that are painful to feel. Ringlet butterflies are abundant. Low to the ground, their dark brown wings rarely still, they flit through the sedges and grasses in search of nectar from clovers, agrimony and self heal. Large skipper butterflies are moving through the bramble flowers on the same task.



Silent assassins are alerted by the signals my warm body is releasing into the air, and they rise from the vegetation intent on a bloody mission. They are clegs — one of 30 or more horseflies in the UK. It is the females that dine on us. Their flight is slow, but soundless, and the first we know is a sudden sharp jab as she gets to work. I think these are notch-horned clegs, and their name is added to the ever-growing species list for the nature reserve.

One of my favourite beetles is clambering through the stamens in the flower of a dog rose. I like it because it is so aptly named that even I can identify it. It is small, but a vision in metallic bronze-green, with bright shining knees that are truly spectacular for its size. Almost certainly, the females are overcome at the sight of those knees. The beetle feeds on flower pollen. Yes — you are right, this is the thick-kneed flower beetle, and very beautiful it is too.



The scores of southern marsh orchids are virtually lost in the welter of recent plant growth. It has been a good year for them, and also for a delicate, small pea flower called smooth tare. Using thin tendrils, it climbs on its neighbours, and it is quite abundant in the reserve. Less common is red bartsia — a small and unusual plant that is partly parasitic. The marsh thistles are sending their purple flowers skywards — I have just photographed one with white flowers, and marsh woundwort. As a result of the winter inundations from the overflowing pond, sedges carpet the damp ground: false fox sedge, glaucous sedge, remote sedge and wood sedge are spreading throughout the sunnier areas of the Orchid Glade.



Laurie Forsyth