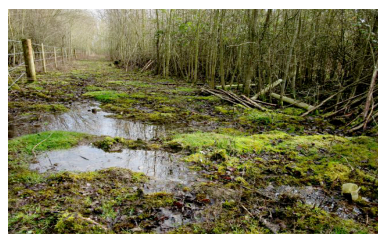


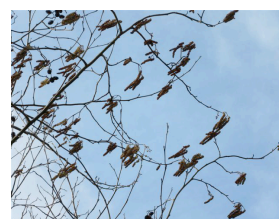
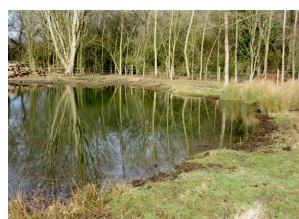
# SGPT Orchard Glade report for March 2017

## Winter's end

March 6<sup>th</sup>, and our Orchard Glade reserve is gearing up for Spring. Vivid green mosses and sedges are carpeting the wet clay soil, and water in countless puddles is reflecting the sky and ruffling in the breeze. A low clay bank behind the pond is basking in the intermittent sun, and small, dark spiders are rushing here and there in the warmth trapped by the new green leaves of wood sedge. When the breeze drops, spreading circles in the mirror surface of the pond mark where diving beetles and newts have risen to take a gulp of air before dashing down into the murky depths.



Reflected in the water are the interlaced twigs of one of the remaining willows that rear behind the pond, and looking up, I can see the first silvery 'pussy willows' that herald the yellow catkins of male flowers that will soon erupt cover the canopy of the tree. Although willows are wind pollinated, the flowers have nectar as well as pollen, and they attract insects, which in turn attract birds: above my head, a pair of blue tits dangle upside down to investigate the willow twigs.



Hazel catkins – the first to flower – are now in decline, and now is the time when alder produces its brown, caterpillar-like catkins. Birch will be next. A pair of cock pheasants are noisily jousting and wing whirring, but apart from them, the reserve is remarkably inactive. All around however, the story is different. Someone is hammering a fencepost out of sight next door; shots and crop guns explode in nearby fields, a chainsaw whines and bellows in the

distance, a rhythmic and deep whoo-who-who of a male stock dove pinpoints his nearby territory, and a drumming great spotted woodpecker tells the same story. In a sudden quiet moment, I hear the peevish mewling of an invisible buzzard from somewhere way above my head. Four long-tailed tits flit from a thicket, and a grey squirrel furtively moves away through the trees as I approach. Woodcock explode from the leafy ground on four occasions and jig away above the thickets. Their beautifully camouflaged wings will soon take them across the grey North Sea, back to breed in Scandinavia, France and Germany.



Rabbits and deer have always made an impact here, and now, at winter's end, and before spring growth has got under way, the signs of their winter grazing, browsing and nibbling are everywhere. Grasses and sedges are grazed flat, and no flowers are visible anywhere. In the depths of a thicket I come across a young tree that has been almost entirely stripped of its bark by fallow deer. It is interesting that this single tree has been browsed so intensively, when thousands of others all around are untouched.



***Laurie Forsyth***