

HARROW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This year's field trip took us to the Kingcombe Centre in Dorset. We did not have the usual luxury of a 3 star hotel, with coffee/tea making facilities in the bedrooms, but the en-suite accommodation was comfortable and a lounge with a T.V. and a kitchen was available on the sites we occupied. Most of the food cooked at the study centre was either sourced locally or grown organically in their own gardens and the feeling that we were living on a farm was made even more potent when we arrived home one day to find 9 black lambs, with their parents, in the field opposite the conservatory where we ate our meals. This gave us the opportunity of taking photo-shots of them being cuddled up and taking milk from a bottle. We were miles from any large town and the centre was surrounded on all sides by an improved farmland with meadows full of wild flowers including common spotted orchids. Because we were lucky enough to have hot sunny weather, we also had butterflies and moths for our usual night adventure. We had so many lepidoptera coming to our light that we managed to get a fairly early night but John had to get up early next morning to identify some of them for us (a list is available if anyone is interested).

On the way to Dorset we stopped off at Langford Lakes, a reserve near Amesbury, which has 4 bird hides and is reputed to have water voles and otters but we never saw them. On Wednesday we went to Portland where our first stop was at Ferrybridge to explore the flora which specialise in shingle beaches and were surprised to see a hare running along the shore-line quite close to us. We then had a conducted tour of Tout Quarry to see the wildlife and sculptures and after lunch another tour of the area this time around Portland Bill lighthouse and bird observatory taken by a member of the R.S.P.B. On Thursday morning we explored the meadows at Kingcombe and I managed to arrange for Caroline to hire the electric "Tramper" from the centre so that she would be able to come with us all the way. This worked fine until a ditch got in the way but no harm was done and between us we hauled the vehicle onto dry land and continued back to the café at the Centre for lunch.

The afternoon found us at Powerstock Common after me taking the "scenic route" around the area and arriving late. (Not entirely my fault, I blame the navigator!) This took the route of a disused railway and was sublime. Butterflies and day-flying moths in abundance, lots of wonderful wild flowers, including a greater butterfly orchid as well as common spotted orchids, and we were also shown the eggs of the common blue butterfly on the birds' foot trefoil by another walker who obviously knew his stuff, and he also pointed out the chrysalis of a burnet moth.

Friday we went to Abbotsbury where we stayed to see the swans being fed and saw the cygnets in the holding pens where they are kept safely until they can be released. This is necessary when they become separated from their parents and are in danger of being attacked by the older swans. In the afternoon we went to the sub-tropical gardens and a short uphill walk gave us stunning views of the coast in both directions.

On the homeward journey on Saturday, we stopped at Avon Country Park, where there is a café as well as some heathland walks. Unfortunately, as the weather had been so hot and dry during May, very little was about apart from the occasional common blue butterfly and I thought I heard a stonechat calling. Close by the visitors' centre was a small compound where they were breeding sand lizards for release into the wild. The hot weather was an advantage

in this case since the occupants, both male and female, decided that it was a good idea to do some sunbathing while the weather lasted, so I got a very good view of an extremely rare reptile.

This filed trip was a little out of the ordinary but I think most of us had a really great time and next year? Probably Suffolk and the usual hotel stay I suppose.

Evelyn Crispe

A VISIT TO SPEYSIDE

For several years I have wanted to visit the Grant Arms Hotel in Granton-on Spey which includes the bird-watching and wildlife centre. I had never seen the ospreys at Loch Garten R.S.P.B. reserve and I had never seen a capercaillie. So in April this year I set off for Aviemore from Kings Cross. As the journey takes 7½ hours I went first class – it was well worth the money with plenty of room and regular refreshments but it was very busy so advance booking was essential.

The Grant Arms Hotel lived up to expectations. All the staff were very helpful. There were two girls who advised on excursions, also a library of wildlife books and a lecture theatre where they showed old David Attenborough films in the evening after dinner. All the services were good and the guests were helpful and friendly.

I had arranged to go on a “Safari”, this started at 5.15am. First we went to a blackcock lek and then on to the hide at Loch Garten where we had good views of the ospreys but no capercaillie (however I went back another morning and had good views of a male displaying). In addition we had chaffinches, siskins, crossbills and a field vole feeding on bits of fallen nuts. After this, we had breakfast in a café with red squirrels running round outside.

During the rest of the day we saw red deer, roe deer and reindeer which were at the bottom of the Cairngorm railway. Also Slavonian grebe, more ospreys, red grouse, moorhen and brown hares, and we ended up in the Findhorn Valley with two golden eagles and some wild goats. I did not have a car but there was a good bus service and you did not have to go far as there was a large area of forest only five minutes walk away. The local workmen put out food for the red squirrels and there were plenty of birds including crested tit. The first willow warblers arrived while I was there. The River Spey was on the far side of the forest – it was in full spate as there had been rain and there were goldeneye and goosanders. Nest boxes had been put out for goldeneyes on the edge of the river.

In all I stayed 11 days and it was a very worthwhile experience. By the way, the Grant Arms Hotel advertises cost etc. in Birds and other magazines.

Elizabeth Stainthorpe

LADYBIRDS

From our records, last year, 2010, there were some ladybird larvae about as late as September. This year, so far, they appeared in May and June. A number of 7-spot ladybirds have been seen from March onwards but the harlequins are still about together with other sightings, such as the 2-spot and melanic 2-spot (black with red markings.)

Thank you, to those of you that have been keeping a record of ladybirds. Please let me have your completed forms in December, so that I may forward them to Paul Mabbott by the end of the year.

Marian Sartin

SUMMER WALKS

Tea on the lawn at Grim’s Dyke Hotel and a true soaking in the Chess Valley were all part of the fun. One of the highlights of the summer season was our July walk for butterflies in Stanmore Country Park, here we saw several marbled whites, a few commas and best of all a purple hairstreak on vegetation by the ponds. I must also mention an excellent trip to the Shepperton Swan Sanctuary in August where we were wholeheartedly welcomed and given a fascinating insight into the work of rehabilitation for injured wildlife.

Tony Lovegrove