

SFPT Simpson's Fromus Valley reserve

Report for March 2014

The river Fromus has enjoyed an energetic winter, thanks to the volume of rainfall that has cascaded onto the clay farmland that forms its catchment area. Medieval owners of Kelsale Park perhaps experienced a similar winter of near-biblical rainfall that may have sparked the thought that they could use the river to form a useful fishpond behind a huge earth dam. Given enough rainfall, the little river can be quite powerful, and the past winter has seen the spectacular 'gorge' scoured a little deeper and wider. Small beaches of fine sediment have formed along the course of the river, and prints in the mud show that pheasant, crow, muntjac deer, fox, rabbit and squirrel use the beaches as watering sites, whilst unknown snails have traced strange squiggles on their wanderings.

Rivers and streams carve down into their beds as centuries pass: they will meander in curves if the ground is flat and the current is slow, and flow faster and straighter on sloping ground. The Fromus is partly blocked by fallen trees in a few places, and deeper water has ponded up behind the obstacles to create a wildlife habitat that is quite different to other reaches of the river, where shallow water 'riffles' across beds of exposed gravel. As the river is known to stop running in summer, aquatic invertebrates, fish and plants may be entirely absent, or very scarce. More puzzling however is the almost complete absence of ground flora growing on the banks of the river in the gorge. Given the shade and humidity that suits ferns, it was odd to record just one fern in the winter — a male fern, which next to bracken is the most abundant fern in Suffolk.

The fine Round Pond is brimming, and its water quality almost certainly guarantees a lusty population of aquatic insects such as damsel and dragonflies, water beetles, water boatmen, and many more. On the day, whirligig beetles and water snails were seen, together with a larva of a caddis fly trundling along inside its protective 'house' made of tiny pieces of plant debris. Remarkably, although the pond is rich in aquatic plants, greater reed mace (often called bulrush) is absent, and that is very good news indeed, because it is capable of over-running small ponds. Flote grass, an unknown pondweed, watercress, water plantain and branched bur-reed were visible in the water. The few plants in flower in the meadows included dog's mercury, red deadnettle, lesser celandine and hazel.

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