

SFPT Orchid Glade Report for March 2014

With winter marked so far by nothing worse than a few mild frosts, the Orchid Glade seems set to enter spring in a period of astonishingly high temperatures. As expected, the reserve is waterlogged following the repeated deluges since Christmas, because the site is on clay, and standing surface water glints in the warm sunshine from every puddle and pool.

The pond is as full as it is possible for it to be – and more. The excess water has run into the adjacent grass and thoroughly saturated quite a large area. Witnessing the inundation, you can see how clay impedes drainage, and appreciate that the southern marsh orchids are growing where they are for a very good reason: at times, the area is a clearly a boggy marsh. The occasional flooding is welcome, and will benefit the flora, although it is important that tractors and other vehicles do not damage the soil and plants when the ground is waterlogged.

A lot of work and expense has gone into creating a stock-proof fence around the reserve, which will be essential when the reserve is grazed. Although the weather is warm enough for occasional butterflies and bumblebees, the trees and shrubs are resolutely leafless, which is as things should be in mid-March. Visibility across and through the reserve is sharpened by the absence of leaves, and the full extent of the grasp held by woodland on the Orchid Glade is obvious.

Very many trees were planted in the days before our Trust acquired the reserve, but their numbers are dwarfed by the legions of ash saplings that have germinated from seeds blown into the reserve from outside. They grow in dense stands within the new fence, and also press up against it on the outside, ready to shed their seeds inside the glade. The Trust hopes to create a wild flower meadow, but the reality is that the site is vigorous young woodland. Increasing the size of the glorious patch of wild flowers at its heart - or even retaining what we have at the moment – will require years of intensive management and more expense to keep the woodland at bay, but the end results could be wonderful. Crucially though, no tree that is cut to achieve this should be allowed to regrow into a troublesome bush.

The important mission of the Trust is to protect and increase the distinctive native wild flowers of Suffolk. It is of concern that large piles of cut brushwood from the fence operation have been stacked in the area where the key species for the Orchid Glade grows – the southern marsh orchid.

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