

SFPT Report for April 2014, Orchid Glade

Rabbits are good for the Orchid Glade!

Rabbits are the most effective management tool the Trust possesses at the Orchid Glade. Years of hard work by the furry mowers have created the rich mix of native plants that flourishes today: species that could not survive their daily nibbling have faded away, but many others have proliferated because they are better adapted to rabbits. The daisies in your lawn would survive even if you mowed them every day, because their leaves are almost flat on the ground.

On 12th April, the more open areas of the reserve were a close-packed green sward of wild plants, with leaves flat on the damp soil, or tucked safely away in neat little leaf rosettes out of harm's way. A rabbit-proof flora has developed. The down side of the visit was the near-complete absence of flowers. Only ground ivy was in flower — and not even a hungry rabbit will eat it. The Trust is pursuing its essential plan to increase the size of the flower-rich area by pushing back the invading tree saplings, and additional, heavy-duty grazing by cattle or ponies will be introduced to deal with regrowth from cut stumps.

This is my first spring at the Orchid Glade. The pond overflowed during the winter deluges and flooded part of the flower-rich area. In its way, it was a form of natural management as beneficial as the rabbits, because the soggy area is really a small marsh in disguise — the home of southern marsh orchid, common fleabane, rushes and marsh thistle. The pollarding of two willows beside the pond has introduced sunlight to the one edge, and it will be interesting to record the rapid colonisation of the bare soil that will now take place. Tadpoles (frog? toad?) are swimming in the shallowest water.

The distinctive leaves of common twayblade orchid are showing in drier areas. Two southern marsh orchids are growing with a close neighbour which riveted my attention - a very handsome form of the southern marsh orchid named the leopard marsh orchid because of its heavily spotted leaves. Guardians will know that meadows adjacent to the reserve support a large population of orchids of several species. On a hot, windy day, the Summer air must be thick with dust-sized orchid seeds, and I feel that the source of the orchids in the Orchid Glade probably lies next door. They are very welcome!

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