

SFPT Orchid Glade report, May 2014

Our unnoticeable Winter has passed seamlessly into a beautiful Spring, and nature is rampant wherever we look. The Orchid Glade simmered in the heat on 19th May.

Blackcaps, chiffchaffs and garden warblers are singing — all are birds with a preference for woodland and scrub — and small white and small copper butterflies flitted from flower to flower in search of nectar.

Cattle that did not relish the task of eating the leafy regrowth from tree stumps have been promptly removed, and following their departure it is a relief to find so many unharmed southern marsh and common twayblade orchids. Several of the unusual 'leopard' variety of southern marsh orchid were seen, with their distinctive spotted leaves.

When surveying for flowers in the spring at the Orchid Glade, the imagination stokes up fantasy conversations with our rabbits, along the lines of “You’ve done a great job all through the winter lads, but you now deserve a long Summer holiday; see you in the Autumn”. The rich diversity of wild flowers at the site is partly attributable to the incessant grazing by rabbits: they perform an important role in scrub control, and their scufflings and diggings create perfect seedbeds for new generations of plants. Unfortunately, they also eat most of the flowers they come across, so recording the flora in the Spring relies largely upon identifying leaves, leaf rosettes and seedlings.

The pond is recovering from years of over-shading by two willows that have been cut in recent months. It is coming back to life. Whirligig beetles are twirling in the water, damselflies are laying eggs in tandem, and two brown dragonflies could be either of the two common 'chaser' species — broad-bodied or four-spotted. Around the pond, corn mint, glaucous sedge, wood sedge, square-stemmed St John's wort, hard rush, self heal and ground ivy can be found: elsewhere, common centaury, common fleabane, hoary ragwort, agrimony and hairy St John's wort are making a welcome appearance.

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