

Orchid Glade (Hasketon) Report for July 2014

Soon, the Reserve will be a sea of yellow

In contrast to SFPT Simpson's Fromus Valley Reserve where the meadow flora is far advanced and haymaking is getting closer, the wild flowers of the Orchid Glade have yet to get into their stride. It seems that the alternately wet, then dry and sunny weather is suiting the flora very well: at the moment, the plants in flower include common agrimony, corn mint, common centaury, marsh thistle and selfheal, all of which are abundant. Scattered here and there are smaller numbers of square-stemmed St John's wort, hoary ragwort, corn sowthistle, red bartsia, hoary willowherb, and the very attractive marsh woundwort. They are all but lost in the sea of common fleabane that flourishes in astronomical numbers throughout the reserve. It has some way to go before it flowers, but when it does it will dominate the Orchid Glade for weeks to come, to the joy of every passing bee, hoverfly, butterfly and moth drawn to its nectar-rich yellow daisy flowers.

Most English plant names were coined so long ago that their origin is lost. The wonderful imaginative names might describe a feature of the plant: taste, scent, size, leaf-shape, seed shape – or they could refer to some useful benefit or medical application, such as the fleabane, woundwort and selfheal growing in the Orchid Glade. Sometimes, the name with warn that a plant or toadstool is capable of killing you. The trick was to be able to recognise the plant you were dealing with. Awareness of wild-plants ran at a much higher level amongst people of all classes than it does today, despite Springwatch and all the field guides we buy.

Removal of overshadowing willow shade beside the pond has unleashed an explosion of colonisation of the once-bare banks. Spiky clumps of blue-grey hard rush have formed, and there is a carpet of small plants and seedlings of corn mint, selfheal, fleabane and wood sedge. The Trust needs to be vigilant in this newly-created damp habitat, because the wet soil is packed with willow seed awaiting this joyous moment. When they germinate, they could form a wall of willows saplings to match the ash saplings elsewhere in the reserve.

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