

SFPT Simpson's Fromus Meadows reserve

September 2014 report

Meteorological records continue to tumble, and it is no surprise to hear that this month is the driest since records began. The River Fromus needs little encouragement to stop running, and sure enough it was reduced to a few pools and puddles on the day I visited. It would be interesting to know what — or if — aquatic wildlife can survive such wild fluctuations. In nature, everything is a home for something.

The meadows are shorn of their hay crop, and the feisty young Red Polls are munching their way through the grass where the orchids were flowering a few months ago. Grey squirrels are working the dense hedgerows with real purpose, and they have good reason. As Autumn rolls on, mammals and birds on the reserve must put on fat reserves that will help them during the cold dark days when the hedges will be bare. The squirrels are also furtively planting acorns in the meadows — a reserve supply of winter food, as long as they remember where the nuts are buried. Jays do the same thing, and it seems their memory retention is even better than the squirrels.

Blackberries, rosehips, hawthorn berries, golden bullace, sloes and the coral-pink berries of spindle glisten among the dewy spiders webs. Red admiral and small tortoiseshell butterflies are making the most of the last flowers: hogweed, yarrow, bristly ox tongue, nipplewort, red clover and creeping thistle. Freshly excavated molehills in the deep soil of the damp lower meadows suggest a very healthy population of earthworms. It's warm and still, and spiderlings are taking to the air: ballooning at the end of floating silk strands, they will travel miles and then descend into a new home. Darter dragonflies jink and twist as they hunt for a meal, and a large — female? — sparrowhawk launches from a large oak and crosses the meadow. Walking back, a covey of twenty red-legged partridges explodes from the long grass a few feet away — testimony perhaps to the need to keep as much long grass as possible on the perimeters of the meadows in Winter.

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