

## **SFPT Orchid Glade report September 2014**

**I visited the Orchid Glade on 23<sup>rd</sup> September — the equinox and officially the first day of Autumn. The first signs of the transition from Summer showed weeks ago in the hedges and sheets of flowers. Now, the most vivid colours are the massed red berries of hawthorn, and russet leaves of field maple and ash. The sea of yellow is just a memory, although you can still find flowering fleabane, hoary ragwort and especially the statuesque yellow sowthistles: last to open their sticky, oblong buds, they blaze like two inch-wide sunflowers.**

**The heady days of growth, flowering and pollination are gone, and now it is all about seeds, berries, nuts and fruit to produce a new generation — and simultaneously provide an overflowing larder that is crucially important if wildlife on the reserve is to survive winter. Autumn can be seen as a time of preparation — of making ready for winter, but also of preparing for next year. The buds of Spring are already in place, but dormant. Autumn is also the season of recycling the dead material from this year so that future generations of flora and fauna will benefit.**

**The supreme recyclers are the fungi. The colourful stems that magically push through the soil overnight are the just the equivalent of flowers — they carry the spores for reproduction. The business end of fungi is subterranean, in a vast, ever-spreading web. On my visit, not a toadstool or mushroom was to be seen, but the fungi are there all right, and have been lurking below ground in the Orchid Glade soil for thousands of years. Invisible, they have ceaselessly processed life's casualties and put them to use. Leaves, twigs, dead wood, droppings, carcasses — you name it. If it is organic, then nature's recycling brigades of fungi and teeming soil invertebrates will do the job. Fungi keep our world tidy and wholesome, and the endless recycling of nutrients ensures that nothing in nature is wasted, to the benefit of future generations.**

***Laurie Forsyth***