

Open Day guest blog by Charles Cuthbert

Local naturalist Charles Cuthbert came along to the Open Day at our Fromus Valley Reserve and enjoyed his walkabout with Jerry Bowdrey, finding new species records for the reserve. He has kindly written a guest blog for us, complete with photographs by him (except common darter which is courtesy of John Rainer).

Open Day walk at SFPT Fromus Reserve on Saturday 6th August 2016

The weather was hot and sunny for the Open Day and a morning walk around the lower part of the reserve led by local naturalist Jerry Bowdrey. There was certainly plenty for the group to see ranging from the grassland flora to butterflies, crickets, grasshoppers, dragonflies and birds, plus a fascinating insight into the world of plant galls, one of Jerry's particular areas of interest – among many!

This was not my first visit to the reserve, but definitely the most enjoyable to date with so much to see and enjoy in near perfect summer weather. The walk route meandered through the meadows now grown up with tall grasses and along the thick hedgerows, ranging from the first pond to the larger upper pond and back.

Both ponds were explored, together with samples of the plentiful insect life hidden in the long grass, as revealed by Jerry's sweep net! As a result various beetles, grasshoppers and crickets could be studied close up in the hand, including Meadow Grasshoppers and two beautiful Roesel's bush-crickets, the latter readily identified by a bright yellow mark along the edge of the pronotum.



Due to the warm weather good numbers of butterflies were on the wing, including two new species recorded for the site, namely Essex Skipper and Brown Argus. At least two of each of these were seen nectaring mainly on

Common Ragwort flowers. In addition to the abundant Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers, Small Copper, Painted Lady, Peacock, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood and the commoner 'Whites' were all found (Large, Small and Green-veined White), mostly around the Bramble bushes now in full flower.



Dragonflies were very active around the ponds, and egg-laying by Common Darters and Southern Hawkers observed. Ruddy Darters were equally common, and both Brown Hawker and Migrant Hawkers were also seen, flying rapidly around the ponds and woodland edges.



It was a quiet time of year for birds, although I was pleased to see small family groups of Goldfinches, Linnets and Yellowhammers. Bullfinches, Green Woodpecker and Buzzard were also seen or heard.

Sharing his expert knowledge of his favourite subject, Jerry introduced us to a range of interesting plant galls associated mainly with the Pedunculate Oaks, but also those growing on Dog Rose, Spear Thistle and Germander Speedwell among others. Each gall is a distinctive growth form of the host plant in response to a specific insect or other natural stimulus, as was explained by Jerry. For example, on the Oaks we saw 'knopper', 'oyster' and 'oak apple' galls – just a few of the many types of galls found on oak trees! Jerry also pointed out the growth of Mistletoe on a Field Maple beside the lower pond, and the gall produced at its point of attachment.



Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to explore the whole of the reserve on this walk, but I would urge others to visit and experience the peaceful character of the area and to discover for themselves its unusual history and diverse wildlife.

Charles Cuthbert

8th August 2016