

SFPT January 2017 report for Orchid Glade

New Year regrets

January 10th 2017 – a mild, blue day at our Orchid Glade reserve, and too late for New Year resolutions. Will I never learn? Once again, wildlife caught me napping, and I was clawing for my camera before I even entered the Orchid Glade reserve. From the road, I just saw a buzzard swoop low over the pond and then glide away low over the trees, startling two young fallow bucks that were probably enjoying a quiet drink in their local watering hole. Their antlers are thin and spiky. I can see more two shapes ‘next door’, lurking in dense ash scrub behind the pond and beyond the boundary fence: one is a dark fallow doe, and the other, smaller, is in classic Bambi garb, white spots and all. About five seconds have passed, and now it is all history. Buzzard, deer and excitement are gone. I located my camera, but all there is to see is a grey squirrel trundling across the wet ground: nice, but short on drama. Memo to me: next time, get the camera out before reaching the gate.

Looking around, I initially thought that this OG report might be my first with no mention of the flora for which the reserve is renowned: all is flat – flailed flat in the autumn, or grazed flat by rabbits, deer and hares. Any early activity by plants has been slowed by the recent hard frosts – except for a single young hazel trailing its bright cream catkins in the sun. The male flowers in the tassels are heavy with pollen, which will waft away with the next passing winter breeze. A great sight – the earliest stirring of Spring – and one that is easy to photograph, even for me.



When I was last here, I removed a little of the dense carpet of submerged moss that is blanketing the shallow water at the edges of the pond. In the summer, the moss hides many newts, and also diving beetles, bugs and caddis species attracted to its protective depths: it is an asset. However, in the absence of competition, it is increasing its area, and smothering the shallow water that is a key zone for aquatic plants. Our pond is almost entirely bereft of these, and as they are key providers of oxygen, of shade, a valuable breeding habitat for myriad invertebrates, and also a source of food, SFPT is trying to get them to colonise the edges of the pond.

Nearby, a young hornbeam is far less advanced than the hazel, but it too will respond to early spring in the next few weeks. Meanwhile, I photograph its trunk: smooth and grey – a little like a beech – the trunk shows vertical fluting, which gives it a muscular appearance.



Hornbeam does well in heavy clay soils like the Orchid Glade.

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